三上延

ビブリア古書堂の事件手帖2

～栞子さんと謎めく日常～

メディアワークス文庫

ビブリア古書堂の事件手帖

Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia's Case Files

Miss Shioriko and Her Enigmatic Daily Life

Written by En Mikami
Illustrated by Hagu Koshijima

Published by ASCII Media Works

Disclaimer

The work translated here is the legal property of its original copyright holder. It is translated here without monetary incentive solely for the purposes of promoting domestic interest in the work and improving personal language proficiency. Should the work be licensed for English translation or upon request by the original copyright holders, please stop distribution of this document at once.

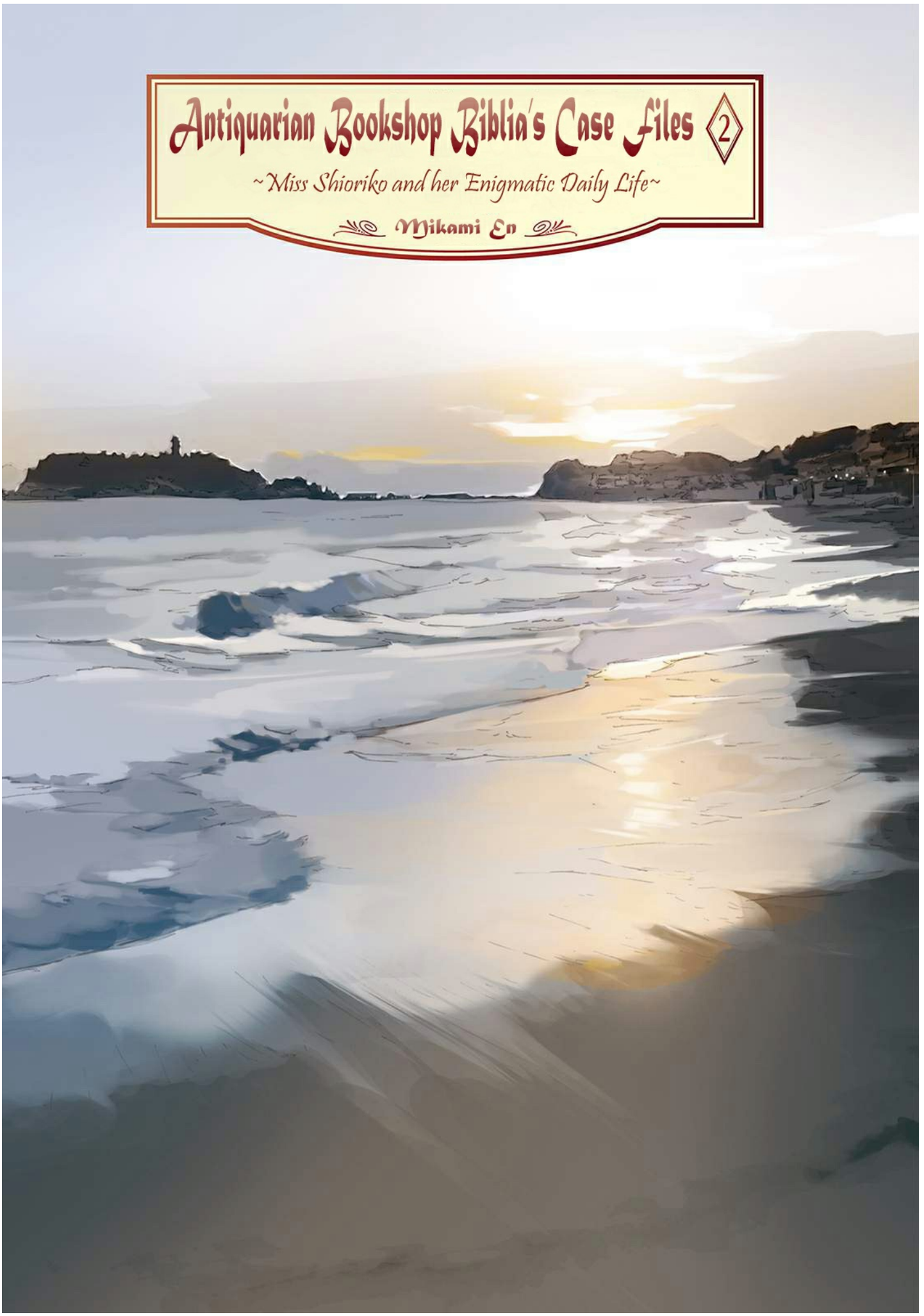
Please send any and all comments to **nanodesuadmin@googlegroups.com**

NOTE: This is an fan-made EPUB and not released by NanoDesu Translations

Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia's Case Files 2

~Miss Shioriko and her Enigmatic Daily Life~

Mikami En



Prologue - Michiyo Sakaguchi "Cra Cra Diary" Bungeishunjū Part I .....page 5

Chapter 1 - Anthony Burgress "A Clockwork Orange" (Hayakawa Paperback NV) .....page 19

Chapter 2 - Sadaichi Fukuda "Essay of Wise Sayings - Salaryman" (June Paperback) .....page 95

Chapter 3 - Fujio Azhizuka "UTOPIA - The Final World War" (Tsuruya Printing) .....page 187

Epilogue - Michiyo Sakaguchi "Cra Cra Diary" Bungeishunjū Part II .....page 248

Translated by Erebea (NanoDesu Translations)

Edited by Ayumi, and Zanzaroo

Typesetter by castor212

supervised by hikaslap

EPUB by swhp

Prologue

Sakaguchi, Michiyo. "Cra Cra Diary" Bungeishunjū Part I.

A flock of sparrows flew up all at once from the building's eaves as I pulled open the shop's rattling sliding door.

They fled across the street until they reached the train station platform on the other side. I had been seeing an unusual number of birds all over the place recently. It was probably because someone in the area had been feeding them. There were quite a few old families with well-maintained gardens in the area, so it wouldn't be strange if there were people around here who liked having wild birds in their yards.

The weather this morning was as pleasant as always. The lukewarm breeze blowing in from the ocean was no doubt a remnant of the burning heat wave from earlier this year. Despite that, the greenery above many of the houses had already begun to fade a little as we entered the month of October.

Kita-Kamakura was also slowly starting to see signs of autumn. Before long, there would be throngs of tourists coming to see the crimson leaves at the Engaku and Kenchou temples.

I took the rotating iron sign outside the shop. The engraved lettering was in old-fashioned brush strokes, but the sign was actually brand new. The old one had recently been damaged in a small commotion the other day, and a special order had been put in with a longstanding and reputable local blacksmith to make a replica. It was certainly well made, but its only fault lay in how heavy it was.

I placed it in front of the store with some difficulty. The text on the sign said "Purchasing of old books, providing honest

valuation". The sign spun a bit as I set it down, and the name of the shop came into view.

"Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia"

That's right, this was a shop that specialized in old books. It was a business that had been established many years ago in Kita-Kamakura. I started working here last summer—

Well, putting it that way wouldn't be entirely accurate. I did quit the job once and only started working here again about a week ago. So many things happened the short time between when I started and resigned, that it would be difficult to explain in a word. In fact, if I were to tell the story in its entirety, it could probably turn into a book. Leaving that aside for now, I had to get everything ready in order to open the store for the day.

I moved the cart with the 100-yen books outside, and after that, swept away the dust that had piled up in the aisles with a broom. The books not only filled the bookshelves, but spilled into the aisles as well, giving off the damp smell only old books could have.

This shop specialized in classical literature as well as history, philosophy, and other humanities books. There weren't many recently published books that could be found here as a result. Naturally, all of the books that the store owned had once resided in someone else's bookshelf in the past. Each and every one of them carried some sort of story. There were books that had been carefully read and loved by their owners, and books that had probably been stored away and forgotten.

It's said that an old book handed down from one person to another contains more than just its contents; the history of the book itself is also a story waiting to be told. The books in this shop will eventually fall into another person's hands, and that will be the beginning of a brand new story.

Well, assuming they get sold at all, that is.

"...ra."

I heard a woman's voice calling faintly and stopped what I was doing to turn my head. There was a door behind the counter that led to the main house where the shop owner lived. The voice seemed to have come from that direction. After putting change into the cash register, the owner had said earlier that she was going to pick up a few things inside the house, but she still hadn't come back.

"…Goura-san." She was calling for me.

I opened the door behind the counter and came across a small space to place my shoes in front of the dimly lit hallway that extended inside. I still could not see the person who had called my name a moment ago.

"….orry… Umm…."

A muffled voice drifted down from the ceiling. It sounded like she was on the second floor. I hesitated a bit, then took off my shoes and stepped into the hallway.

The main building was just as old as the shop and the warped floorboards creaked as I made my way across the hall. I normally only went into the main building to use the toilet. Just because I was an employee, it didn't mean I could walk into the owner's house whenever I felt like it. There were two young ladies living here, after all.

"Do you need any help?"

I spoke from the foot of the staircase. The steps turned at an angle halfway up, which made it difficult to see what was happening on the second floor. The owner had a bad leg, and a brand new handrail had recently been installed to make it easier for her to go up and down the stairs.

"…please…a moment…"

I heard the muffled voice reply but wasn't sure what it was supposed to mean. Did she want me to come upstairs or wait

down here?

“Is it alright if I come up?”

“……yes.”

What could this be about? I started to get nervous as I climbed the stairs. I had heard that the owner’s room was on the second floor, so I told myself not to look around any more than I had to.

“…Whoa!”

My eyes went wide when I finally reached the dimly lit second floor. The short hallway was filled with waist-high stacks of old books piled up together. If someone were to see this without knowing anything, they would definitely have thought it was just a storage area. There was a narrow path between the books that led to a sliding door at the end of the hall.

To be honest, coming across a scene like that really wasn’t much of a surprise. The owner of the Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia was someone who was happiest with her nose buried in a book. That is to say, she was a bookworm in every sense of the word. She had been hospitalized until just recently, and the nurses had constantly complained about her having too many books in her hospital room.

I stopped at the sliding door at the end of the hallway and I was just about to call out to her when something odd caught my eye. The wall to my immediate left had yet another pile of books.

There was also a small white bird with its wings folded hidden among them. Of course, it wasn’t actually a real bird, but a painting on a canvas caught between the books and the wall. The corner of the painting was the only part of it that I could see.

Why is there even a painting here?

I tilted my head. The painting looked pretty old, and its surface was covered in a thin layer of dust. The fact that it had been carelessly tossed into a pile of books instead of being hung up or

stored away struck me as odd.

The painting itself piqued my curiosity as well.

There was a mountain of books in the background behind the bird to the point that it looked like it could have been a part of this hallway's scenery. I had never seen a painting with such a heavy book motif before and seeing this made me wonder what the rest of it looked like.

The sliding door opened suddenly, jolting me back to my senses.

"Ah….!"

The one who let out that cry wasn't me, but a thin young lady with long black hair. She had a pretty, pale face, and looked to be about 25 years old. She wore a plain outfit composed of cardigan over a blue floral-patterned dress, and the glasses set on the bridge of her thin nose had almost collided into my chest just now.

"Ex-excuse me…"

Her face, devoid of makeup, turned bright red as she took a clumsy step back. Her upper body swayed unsteadily, and she grabbed onto the handle of her crutches to regain her balance.

Her name was Shinokawa Shioriko, and she was the owner of the Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia.

"Are you all right?"

"Um…yes…"

She averted her eyes and turned around with embarrassment—

No, that wasn't it. She was actually making sure the Modern Popular Literature Full Collection stacked behind her hadn't fallen over.

The partition between two small rooms had been removed to combine the two Japanese-styled rooms into one. Judging by the bed and wardrobe near the south-facing window, the second floor was their living area.

The rest of the room, however, was filled with books. There were steel racks with multicolored paperbacks, photo albums, and art books stacked so high that they almost reached the ceiling. Alongside them were wooden bookshelves with encyclopedia volumes arranged neatly behind glass doors. Even the floor was piled with everything from niche philosophy and history books to old literature collections and back issue manga anthologies. It was just like the hallway in that there was barely any space left to stand.

The clutter in the hallway was probably just the overflow from this room. At this rate, it wouldn't be long until the books spilled down the stairs onto the first floor.

"I-I couldn't keep everything organized. It's a bit much, isn't it?"

"Eh? Not at all."

I didn't plan on making any follow-up to that. I'd already known she would have at least this many books. Besides, seeing the room like this was pretty soothing.

It wasn't like I hated books or anything. I had an interest in them, but reading was extremely difficult for me. If I read even ten pages or so, I would break out into a cold sweat, and my fingers would tremble. The cause for that was probably psychological. Simply put, it was a problem with my "condition".

I was still interested in books and things related to them even though I was unable to read.

"So what's going on?"

"Umm… Could you take this bundle of books downstairs? They're mine, but I won't read them again…so I'd like to put them on the wagon outside and sell them."

She pointed to the stack of books right next to her. They were all hardcover, and were bound together with a vinyl cord. There were two bundles of ten or so books, and judging by the spines,

they looked like old novels and essays. They didn't seem to be in bad condition, though.

"…Are these going to be sold at 100 yen each?"

"No…please label those for sale at 300 and 500 yen respectively. The books in the top bundle will be sold at 500 yen, and the ones at the bottom will be sold at 300. Check their condition one last time before you do that, though."

Shinokawa's speech had become a little more eloquent. She always became livelier when talking about books.

"Please take the 100 yen label off of the wagon as well, if you could."

"Got it…"

I nodded my head in acknowledgement but was suddenly taken aback. After finishing her explanation, she picked up one of the bundles with her left hand and placed it on the floor in front me. Perhaps it was due to her loose fitting dress, but when I looked downward, I was able to see her cleavage for a moment. I wasn't exactly thrilled, since I wasn't sure where to look anymore.

Telling her about it wasn't an option either, so I just crouched in front of the books to get it out of my line of sight.

"…So the ones at the bottom of the pile are 500 yen each?"

I asked a question to diffuse the awkward situation, and her white index finger came into view.

"It's the other way around. The ones at the top are 500 yen."

She reached over the top of my head, and I felt just a hint of her large breasts on my hair. The ends of her black hair brushed against my ear and left me unable to move from shock.

"…Sorry… Were you able to understand my explanation?"

Her voice drifted down sweetly. She might not have been doing it intentionally, but that actually made it so much worse.

“O-of course.”

I stared the spines of the bundled books to calm my fluttering heart.

Cra Cra Diary

The title of a book came into my sight. The author was listed as Sakaguchi Michiyo. The text, which looked like it was hastily written, was printed onto the grey covers. For some reason, all five of the books in the set had the exact same title. *Cra Cra Diary*, *Cra Cra Diary*, *Cra Cra*, *Cra Cra*— It was really vexing how spot on they described my feelings at this moment.

“…what is this Cra Cra Diary about?”

My question was met with a brief silence.

“…They’re essays that Sakaguchi Ango’s wife wrote after he passed away.”

So the family name was Sakaguchi? I had heard of Sakaguchi Ango before; I seemed to remember that he was an author from long ago. The fact that I even knew his name must have meant he was pretty famous. Unfortunately, I had never read any of his books.

“It’s a story about the Sakaguchis, from the time they met until the day Ango passed away…it brings to mind stories about happy couples. I think it’s pretty nice.”

Her voice was so soft that I could hardly hear it.

“Why is it called the Cra Cra Diary then?”

“After her husband’s death, the author opened a bar in Ginza and named it ‘Cra Cra’. According to the book’s afterword, Shishi Bunroku was asked to come up with a name for the bar. It seems it was often frequented by prominent figures in the literary

community.”

She answered almost offhandedly, without even pausing to think. As always, her knowledge was formidable when it came to books.

“Does Cra Cra mean getting tipsy[1]?”

“No…. It means pigeon in French.”

“Pigeon?”

That was an unexpected answer.

“Well, it’s also a name for the type of common girl that can be found anywhere.”

Hearing about pigeons reminded me of the painting with the bird I saw in the hallway. Perhaps that was also a white pigeon.

I internally sighed a little. Something about her attitude was a little strange. She normally got really excited whenever there was an opportunity to talk about books.

“…Shinokawa-san, is something wrong?”

I lifted my head to look at her, but her creased dress blocked my view.

“Oh? No…not really……”

She got up and moved a bit further away. I still couldn’t see the expression on her face.

“It’s just…these books….”

“Books?”

“I just can’t bring myself to like them. I do think they’re well-written, though.”

So it wasn’t the type of book she liked. Perhaps that’s why they were being sold so cheaply. It was normal for readers to have their own preferences, anyway. I picked up the books with both hands and stood up.

“Alright, I’ll take these outside.”

“Thank you.”

I left the room and walked through the hall carefully so the books wouldn’t fall out of my hands. They gently shook in time to my steps.

Suddenly a small doubt popped into my head.

…Why does she have so many copies of the same book, anyway?

She most likely bought them herself. But if she didn’t like the book, why would she have bought so many copies? I stopped and turned to look at the open sliding door behind me.

…well, it’s probably not important.

I shrugged my shoulders and headed down the stairs. There really was no point in thinking about it. I heard some birds chirping in the distance. Perhaps that was a Cra Cra sound…

With that, I stopped thinking about the books altogether.

Chapter 1

Burgess, Anthony. A Clockwork Orange. Hayakawa Paperback NV.

I really don't know anything about books.

This was something that I'm acutely aware of. I'm not proud of it; that's honestly just the way things are.

It all started when a fax came in one early afternoon. The shop owner, Shinokawa, had stepped out of the shop for lunch, and I was minding the store alone in her place. I was taking advantage of the lull in customers to attach prices tags to the newly discounted books in the cart when the fax machine whirred and spit out a sheet of paper.

"I am looking for a book by Kunieda Shirou, Complete Series of the Ivy Wood Crosspiece, printed by Tougen Publishing. I will also call about this later."

It looked like an inquiry about our inventory. The shop did receive faxes or phone calls from customers looking for specific items from time to time. Although it was more efficient to search the catalog on our website, many of the elderly customers still did not use cell phones or computers.

I looked over the fax once, then brought it closer to my face to read again. The faint and shaky handwriting was not the only reason I was having trouble reading it. "Tougen" was the name of the publishing company, and Kunieda Shirou was the name of the author. The title, however, was a complete mystery to me.

"Complete series… Ivy…Crosspiece…?"

I just couldn't understand it. The title didn't make any sense no matter how I spaced the words. I turned my head to look towards

the door leading to the main house. Shinokawa would definitely know if I asked her.

The phone rang just as I placed my hand on the doorknob. I gripped the message in one hand and picked up the phone receiver with my free hand.

"Thank you for calling the Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia, this is—"

"—About the fax I sent a moment ago."

The hoarse male voice on the other end cut me off. His gentle voice had a Kansai accent. He said a moment ago, but it hadn't even been a minute since he'd sent the fax.

"Do you have it? Kunieda Shirou's book."

He pressed me for an answer, sounding rushed. I would have liked it if he had told me the full title of the book, but it looked like he was still waiting for my answer.

"…I'll go look for it. Would you mind holding for just a moment?"

I stopped myself right as I was about to press the hold button. I did say I was going to look for it, but how I was I going to do that without knowing what type of book this was?

"Er…. Is this book…a novel?"

"Of course it is. Did you not know that?"

I swallowed nervously. I wouldn't be able to lie here.

"I did not. My apologies."

I heard a snort on the other end of the line. I couldn't tell whether it was out of shock, or if he was just holding back laughter.

"Are you the only person in the shop right now?"

"…That is correct."

"Ah, I see. You're an amateur, aren't you?"

He suddenly hung up on me, leaving me hanging. My back was covered in a cold sweat before I realized it.

Customers that are truly angry will not accept any apologies. Never forget that.

The words of my late grandmother who passed away last year came back to me. It was a lesson from someone who had managed a diner in Ofune for decades, but it applied perfectly to this situation.

I had made this customer angry. What kind of bookshop employee would ask a customer a question like that, anyway?

"…Is something the matter?"

A long haired woman suddenly appeared next to me and looked up at my face from behind her glasses. It was the store owner, Shinokawa. I hadn't noticed her return from the main house.

"Did someone call?"

"It was a question about our stock. They sent us a fax before calling, but…."

I briefed her on what happened with a heavy heart, handing the fax over to her. Her expression suddenly lit up as she read it.

"Ah, it's *The Ivy Bridge of Kiso*. This was printed by the Tougen publishing company."

"I-Ivy…?"

"It's a suspension bridge in Kiso. The story itself is incredibly interesting. It's a legendary novel that was released in the late Taisho era by Kunieda Shirou, about two beautiful siblings on their journey to get revenge on the feudal lord of Kiso for killing their parents. I read it when I was younger. The characters, you see…"

"Pl-please wait a second."

I brought myself back to reality before I could get sucked into the

story. I really wanted to hear the rest of it, but reporting what had happened came first.

“The truth was that the order was canceled. It was my fault, since I’d made a mistake dealing with the customer.”

I tried to keep the explanation as short as possible and didn’t add in any excuses. She listened until the end while nodding her head and leaned on the crutch under her right arm. She stared at the fax in her hand.

“And the customer’s number was also withheld….”

She said that a little regretfully. We couldn’t even call back to apologize now. It was a shame, because we did have the book in stock.

“I’m sorry.”

I lowered my head in apology. My misery must have been visible on my face, because she clasped her hands in front of her and tried to cheer me up.

“I-it’s alright…. You see, you just started working here, so it’s okay if you don’t know everything. You might be completely useless right now, but you’ll get better with more experience.”

“……”

I knew it, I was completely useless. Hearing her say it so clearly made me even more depressed.

I—the completely useless amateur, Goura Daisuke—started working here while Shinokawa was recovering in the hospital from a leg injury. I initially approached her to ask if she could appraise the *Souseki Complete Collection* that my late grandmother had left me.

In addition to her vast knowledge about books, Shinokawa also had a special ability. She could instantly unravel the mysteries surrounding books, using only tenuous clues and the stories

people told her about them. The secret behind my grandmother's Souseki Complete Collection was unraveled by her rare insight.

Shinokawa was the one who proposed that I work at the shop. I was still an unemployed graduate at the time, with strength as my only redeeming feature. Although I didn't read, I still had an interest in books so there was no reason to refuse an invitation from a beautiful woman who loved talking about them.

And so I became an employee at the Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia and personally witnessed Shinokawa's incredible ability in solving the mysteries behind old books. However, after the incident surrounding her personal copy of Dazai Osamu's *The Late Years*, I decided to quit my job at the shop.

Shinokawa managed to escape from an antiquarian book fanatic with both the book and her life intact. However, the method she used was one that sacrificed our mutual trust. It wasn't something that I could accept.

Shortly after she was discharged from the hospital, she approached me while I was still looking for another job and presented me with the first edition of The Late Years which she valued above all else in an attempt to repair our relationship. I didn't accept the book, but instead asked her to explain in detail what *The Late Years* was about.

That was how we were able to reconcile. After her talk, which continued until the sun set, she suddenly changed her expression and straightened her back.

"I……um….if…you….."

Her hurried words came out awkwardly. I mentally prepared myself for what was going to come next.

"…go back….to the shop….."

It looked like she wanted to ask me to work at the shop again. She was blushing up to her ears; her cute face as she turned away

tugged at my heartstrings.

“….a-again because….”

Listening to her made something well up within me. It made me consider just asking her to let me work there all the more, but there were circumstances which made that difficult. I had a good feeling about the job interview I had earlier that day. It must have also been hard for her to ask me to abandon my job hunt for sake while I was still wearing my interview suit.

In the end,

“Would it…be alright if I got in touch with you later?”

“Ah? Sure.”

The conversation ended with that. I watched her take a taxi back to Kita-Kamakura and agonized over the options available to me. Should I should I join a proper company, or should I go back to working part time under the beautiful, yet eccentric antiquarian book shop owner?

As it turned out, there had been no need to think about it too deeply. A few days later, I got a notification from the food company I interviewed with saying I didn’t get the job. They listed rising flour prices, tightened budgets, and the number of applicants that applied as the reason for their decision. There was a note wishing me the best on my future endeavors at the end of the lengthy letter.

I looked up the company on the internet and found that there had been a great number of people who had got their expectations up because their interview had gone oddly well. I had also been one of them. Shinokawa called while I was still depressed about not getting the job. She didn’t have any particular reason to call, but she was faithfully keeping her promise to get in touch with me.

I told her what happened with my job search and asked her if I could start working at the shop again.

“O-of course! I’m looking forward to working with you again.”

She stammered a little and happily obliged. And so I finally returned to the place where I felt I belonged.

“…Could you put these books away next? They go on the second shelf of the bookcase to the far right over there.”

Shinokawa’s faint voice drifted out to me from inside the shop.

“Ah, alright.”

I picked up the books piled on the counter and walked to bookshelf that she pointed out near the entrance. This part of the store contained Japanese history related books and had a lot of empty spots in its shelves. I inserted the dark-colored specialty books into the shelf.

Shinokawa had been keeping me busy rotating stock ever since I returned to the store. The bookshop naturally needed to switch out the books that were out on the floor. Although we had many regular customers, nobody would want to go to a store where the product line never changed.

We may have only had old books on our shelves, but that didn’t mean we could always keep the same ones on display. It was common sense, if you thought about it.

The number of customers bringing in their books to the shop had multiplied since Shinokawa returned. They could only sell books in-store at the moment, but there were plans to restart the “in home purchasing” program soon. We would start visiting customers at their homes to buy the books directly once that began.

Shinokawa was on her computer managing online orders while she instructed me on what to do. She was currently updating the online catalog with the latest arrivals.

The atmosphere in the shop was completely different compared to when I worked alone. I chalked it all up to the shop owner's presence.

But not all of our troubles were gone.

"Shinokawa, where should I put this book?"

I turned towards her and held up Nawa Yumio's *Encyclopedia of Jutte Capture Techniques*. She was hidden behind the wall of books stacked on the counter so only part of her face was visible from where I was.

"Put on the third level of that shelf over there, right next to Social Systems of Edo, please."

Shinokawa replied and went back to what she was doing. She didn't even try to look up from her book.

Of course, that didn't stop her from doing customer service, although she did have the tendency to mumble when asking customers for their IDs and performing other shopkeeper duties. When the conversation turned to books, however, she became a real chatterbox.

Her sudden change in demeanor usually startled customers and they often ended up finding some convenient reason to escape the shop

Every time this happened, she would go back to her books, looking exhausted. Although she didn't want to admit it, her customer service skills weren't all that great. The problem wasn't with her ability, but with her personality—she just wasn't suited for it. So I was the one who operated the cash register and did things that didn't require much knowledge. For the time being, as an amateur, this was the best I could do.

"It's about time we closed up the store, isn't it?"

Shinokawa raised her voice from behind the counter. She looked out the glass door and saw the gentle-looking sun setting over the

asphalt. It had already become dusk before I knew it.

“Since I’m already done here, do you want me to total the register?”

“If you could.”

I was now empty handed and was ready to return to the counter when something on one of the bookshelves caught my eye. *The Ivy Bridge of Kiso* was lined up right next to *Edogawa Ranpo’s Complete Collection* in the corner where all the old drama and detective novels were.

Against my better judgment, I picked it up off the shelf and turned to the first page. A sudden shiver ran down my back, not because of the contents of the book but rather, because of my “condition”. I quickly ran my eyes over the sentences. The story looked like it was set in the warring states period.

Two men were gossiping about the world’s most unthinkably beautiful prostitute.

“No way, what if there’s an evil spirit possessing that woman….?”

“Evil spirit? What do you mean, possessed?”

“You didn’t know?”

“This is just hearsay, but I head there’s a terrible curse surrounding Niodori.”

“Huh, that’s the first I’ve ever heard of it.”

“They say that it looks like she goes from this world to the underworld whenever night falls. In other words, she dies. And then after just a little while, she comes back to life!”

It looked like Niodori was that prostitute’s name. What did they mean when they said that she came back to life after dying? I was curious and wanted to read a little more, but there was still work to do, so I put the book back.

Shinokawa said earlier that she read the book as a child. But this

was definitely a book for adults. There were also a lot of complicated kanji —did she really understood what the book was about?

“She’s been reading difficult books ever since she was young, huh?”

The bespectacled shop owner suddenly looked up from behind her book and I showed her the cover of the *The Ivy Bridge of Kiso*. She smiled shyly and hid herself behind her book again.

“…I was fast at learning kanji.”

I could only hear her voice.

“I loved reading manga and children’s books, but I was interested in books meant for adults, too. …I would take my monthly allowance and rush over to the Shimano bookstore on my bike and just stare at all of the shelves; every single one. I bought *The Ivy Bridge of Kiso* back then when it was republished as a paperback.”

The Shimano bookstore was a well-known bookshop turned stationary store. It was close to the Kita-Kamakura station on Wakamiya Street. Everyone who lived near it had entered at least once.

“You said Shimano; does that mean you went towards Ofuna?”

There was also a Shimano bookstore in the shopping district across from Ofuna Station, where I’d go as a kid. We might have passed each other at one point.

“No. I went to both of them. The Ofuna and the Kita-Kamakura stores had different product lines.”

“Huh?”

Kita-Kamakura, where we were right now, was located between the Ofune station and the Kamakura station. Even if you were an adult, going between those two stations in one trip would be pretty

hard. And the road sloped pretty deep on the way. I tried to imagine the image of an elementary school Shinokawa biking to a bookstore, but couldn't.

Thinking about it, I don't know much about her at all.

She was born and raised in the area, inherited the Antiquarian Bookshop from her father who died last year, and really loved books — I didn't know anything besides that.

"Shinokawa, what kind of…" I started, but I was interrupted.

The glass door clanged open, and a tall, short haired high school girl entered the shop. She had a stiff expression and dignified features. The short sleeved white blouse and grey skirt she had on was the uniform of the high school halfway up the mountain. That was the school I used to go to.

"Yo."

"…Hey"

Kosuga Nao lowered her head a little and cautiously looked around the shop. Both her behavior and facial expressions were boyish.

"Is the shop manager here right now?"

"Eh? Err…."

"No, it's okay… I didn't call ahead."

Since Shinokawa was hidden, Nao thought there were less people here than there actually were. I gave a questioning sidelong glance at Shinokawa.

I realized this recently, but this girl rarely stayed long when Shinokawa was around. She was involved in a theft in the past, but that matter was settled and the victim happily accepted her apology in the end. The person who led them to a resolution was Shinokawa.

Perhaps this high school girl never forgot her shocked she was

when Shinokawa discovered she was the culprit, but Nao claimed that she somehow had a hard time dealing with Shinokawa. It seemed like she thought Shinokawa could always tell what she was thinking. Shinokawa knew she was being avoided too, so she probably hid herself out of consideration.

“The truth is, I came here to discuss something with you, Goura.”

She brought her face closer so she wouldn’t be overheard.

“Discuss? With me?”

“Yeah, is that alright?”

I didn’t know why she’d ask me, but it was still a request from one of our regular customers.

“Have you read *A Clockwork Orange*?”

“No, I haven’t.”

I had heard of the title, but I had no idea what it was about. I thought it was the title of an old movie, but I guess that was based off of the original work.

It looked like my answer wasn’t what she had been hoping for.

“I thought you’d have read it. You work in a bookshop.”

Since she said that, it meant that she didn’t know about my “condition” which prevented me from reading books. She must have come because she thought I could at least somewhat discuss this with her. But if it was a discussion on books she wanted, the most suitable person for that was hidden in plain sight.

“Sorry about that,” I said.

“Don’t worry about it. Anyway, I have some thoughts on the book written here. Could I ask you to read through them?”

“Thoughts?”

“Just take a minute and read it.”

She took out a folded up paper form the schoolbag hanging on

her shoulder and handed it to me. I unfolded the lined paper to read its contents.

The first line had "*A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess", written in neat handwriting. This looked like a book report. The next line had "Year 2, Class 1, Kosuga Yui"—the author's name.

"My younger sister wrote this. She's only a second year in middle school right now, but she's pretty smart."

"So you have a sister?"

It was the first time I had heard of this. For some reason, she gave off the impression of being an only child.

"I have three siblings, including older brother who's a little older than you."

Her expression brightened up as she talked about her siblings. She definitely had a good relationship with them.

"My sister wrote this for her summer vacation homework…but it ended up causing a huge argument at home…"

I began to read.

> A Clockwork Orange by Anthony Burgess.
>
> Year 2, Class 1 – Kosuga Yui
>
> The moment I finished reading this book, I immediately went to listen to Beethoven's 9th symphony since it was mentioned so many times in the story. It was longer than I thought it would be, but the final chorus was incredibly beautiful and made my heart tremble.
>
> I brought this book from an online bookstore without knowing what kind of story it was. I thought it would be about machines or fruit and was surprised when neither showed up in the

story.

I’m sure there are plenty of people who got disgusted and couldn’t finish reading this book. The main character, Alex, has a strange way of speaking and constantly does terrible things. He beats up strangers in the street, breaks into homes to steal money, and assaults girls. He feels no remorse no matter what he does and just spends time with his friends talking about music.

Alex is arrested by the police, thrown into prison and ends up being brainwashed after he refuses to repent. He is drugged and forced to watch images of death and brutality as part of something called the “Ludovico Technique”. As a result of that treatment, Alex becomes unable to commit any violence.

Although he becomes a good person, Alex is still incapable of finding happiness. Following a vicious attack from his old friends where he was unable to even fight to defend himself, Alex screams in anguish that he has become just like a clockwork orange. Like a clockwork machine, he no longer had any control of his own actions. The prison chaplain once told Alex that becoming a good person was sometimes a horrifying, unpleasant experience. It gave me the impression that the author was saying that depriving someone of their ability to commit evil did not necessarily mean that they would become a good person. More importantly, perhaps sinning is also part of what makes us human.

There's nothing wrong with having an interest in things we shouldn't do; we all have some darkness in our hearts after all.

In the end, Alex's head was tampered with in a hospital and he goes back to committing crimes again. To add to that, a cabinet minister who wants to use Alex for publicity shows up. Not a single good person appeared in the novel. The only thing that Alex could really trust was his music.

While Alex listened to his beloved Beethoven's 9th symphony in the hospital, he imagines the world screaming at him. When I listened carefully to the song myself, I thought that perhaps I could hear the world screaming to me as well.

"What did you think?"

I looked up from the paper and saw Nao eagerly awaiting my response.

"This story sure is bleak."

I was curious about the part where she said that not a single good person appeared. Stories like that were interesting. The main character was an awful guy to begin with, but what about people like the cabinet minister and the chaplain?

"That's not what I'm talking about, what did you think of her book review?"

"Hmm….well, this is pretty well written for a second year student."

I didn't really have any thoughts about it since I hadn't read the actual novel. I also had no way tell whether or not her assertions were correct.

“I know, right? My little sister is amazing!”

Nao’s eyes were shining even after my noncommittal response.

“She’s loved books ever since she was young, and she’s really good at writing these book reports. Yui has won awards for her writing every year since elementary school.

“Awards?”

“In the school book report writing competition. My brother and I never did well. Personally, I think Yui’s writing was always better than what the other kids submitted.”

Wasn’t she just saying that because it was her younger sister? There was no denying that it was a good book report though.

“So what happened?”

Based on the content, it looked like Nao’s sister completed the assignment properly. I couldn’t really find fault with it.

“The book was sold out at the bookstore in front of the station, so Yui asked me to order it from an online bookstore.”

She mentioned the name of the bookstore. I had never used it before, but I heard that they would ship items within the same day if it was in stock.

“I was curious about it at the time, since the book sounded so impressive, and she was going to write a report about it. I tried to read it after it was delivered, but there was way too much violence after all. I mean, it was just gross and cruel. I only read the beginning, but it was still too intense for me.”

Nao frowned.

“But Yui read it completely, wrote the book report, and turned it in at school. But I guess her school was just too rigid about it.”

“What school does she go to?”

“Seiri. Seiri Girls’ Academy. She started there this year.”

“Ah.”

I heard the name and understood. Seiri was a Catholic school, and the grade levels ran from middle to high school. It was famous for being strict. The closest station to it was Ofuna Station, so I saw students and nuns from there often.

“It started when Yui’s homeroom teacher showed my parents the book report the other day, at the parent teacher meeting.

“Her teacher said that it was a well written report,” she continued, “and that he was concerned because she was at a sensitive age. Basically, he was warning her. But my parents were shocked to hear this. They were seriously worried that Yui had also gotten caught up in something inappropriate for her. She’s a good, respectful girl, unlike me.”

I looked over the paper again. There definitely were a couple places where it looked like she sympathized with the main character. *Perhaps sinning is also part of what makes us human and there’s nothing wrong with having an interest in things we shouldn’t do came to mind.*

Her thoughts on the book were childishly simple, but I suppose there were parents that would be worried.

Hmm

I tilted my head. What did she mean by Yui was also caught up in something?

“Did you perhaps tell your parents about what happened with *Gleaning*?”

“Hm? Yeah, I told them.”

She nodded her head as if to say that it were only natural.

“I didn’t tell Yui or my other siblings, but I talked to my parents just in case.”

Gleaning was the name of the book she once stole. The issue was

dropped at the victim's request, so we thought she was going to hide it from her parents. She had a surprisingly honest, or should I say, overly upright, personality.

"My parents started asking Yui and I to show them every book we brought in. It felt like they didn't even trust their own kids anymore. I understand why they would check my stuff, but Yui didn't even do anything wrong. I wanted this to stop somehow so I came here to ask you for advice on how to persuade them."

Now I understood the gist of the problem. It was because Nao was feeling responsible. The reason her parents had such an overboard response this time was because of the trouble she caused with her theft before.

I shot a fleeting glimpse towards the counter. Shinokawa wasn't making a single sound from behind the wall books. It was probably because she listening hard as we talked.

"Can I keep this book report with me for a bit?"

"Sure, but why?"

"I want to show it to Shinokawa."

Nao had a sour look on her face that said she didn't really want Shinokawa to get involved.

"She knows a lot about books and she understands the feelings of book lovers well. That's why I want to discuss it with her. She would be better suited for this than me."

I was thinking about what Shinokawa said yesterday. About how she biked to the bookstore every month and happily bought a Taisho era book as a child. She was just like Yui as a child. There was no better person to ask for help and I knew she wouldn't spare any effort for this.

"I'll ask her about this and get back in touch with you later. Is that alright?"

Nao thought about it for a little bit and nodded her head.

“Alright.”

It was time to close up the shop so I started putting all the change in the coin counter. A chilly autumn wind was blowing in from the half open glass door. Kosuga Nao had forgotten to close it.

I heard the sound of turning pages in the background. Shinokawa was reading the book report. It was now closing time and she finally appeared from behind the mountain of books on the counter.

“What did you think of it?”

She didn’t respond. I stopped what I was doing and turned my head. Shinokawa was seated in a folding chair and had her head tilted back so she could lean on the books behind her.

“Well, this is…how should I say this…”

Shinokawa turned over the paper and read it from the beginning one more time. She had an extremely perplexed expression on her face.

Her frustrated face was attractive, too, and I caught myself being fascinated by it. Before long, she spoke again, still facing downward.

“This book report is…”

“Ah, I was right. So Kosuga brought that thing here.”

The speaker had a rough voice. Before I realized it, a thin, bald man was leaning his elbow on the counter. He looked like he was in his late fifties and wore a gaudy t shirt under a wrinkled red jacket. The plaid patterned bag hanging from his shoulder was filled with old paperback books.

“Oh, Shida, hello.”

“Don’t ‘hello’ me, you oaf. You’re dealing with money here, so pay attention when people come in. What would you do if I were a

thief?”

His articulate abuse came flying at me. Shida, the homeless book hunter who lived under the Kugenuma Bridge. He was a regular customer here and made his money selling old books.

“I – it’s been a while.”

Shinokawa struggled clumsily to get up, but Shida waved his hand exaggeratedly to stop her.

“It’s okay, no need to get up, sister. You’re as soft spoken as ever, I see. Why don’t you try speaking up sometimes?”

“Ah…sorry…”

Shinokawa shyly shrank away. I would have liked him to lay off her a little…she hid herself behind the pile of books again.

“So what brings you here today?” I asked.

“Nah, I’m not here for any particular reason. I just heard this place reopened recently so I came by to say hello and relax. That the paper that Nao’s little sister wrote, isn’t it?”

He pointed his chin at the paper Shinokawa held in her hand.

“How did you know?”

“Because she decided to bring it over to my place. ‘How should I convince my parents? I need your help,’ she said”.

He was unexpectedly good at imitating her voice. Shida was the owner of the Gleaning that Kosuga Nao stole. An odd relationship sprouted up between the victim and the perpetrator ever since the thieving incident. They met once a week near the river to exchange books and talk about their impressions. Nao became closer to him and called him sensei. Shida was pretty fond of her, too.

“So what did you tell her?”

As a book hunter, Shida was also very knowledgeable about

books. There was nothing odd about asking for advice from her trusted teacher. However, she came directly here after talking to him, which meant that…

“I told her that it was only natural that her parents were worried. Kosuga looked disappointed, but I just can’t bring myself to like that book.”

I was right. She came here because she couldn’t get any advice from Shida.

“I read it once long ago, and I wouldn’t want to read it again. Hey, Goura, have you read *A Clockwork Orange* before?”

I shook my head no. The way Shida spit the question out startled me.

“It’s exactly as it’s written in the book report there. The main character does whatever he wants. He does drugs, steals things, assaults women, anything he can get away with. But I’m not saying the author is telling people to do these things, even if he did create a nightmarish world without a speck of hope. It’s paradoxical.

“Well, people can be interested in all sorts of things, so I suppose some of them sympathize with stories like this. The issue isn’t that she thought this way. The problem is that she wrote all of this down and then turned it in at school. If she’s like this in middle school, what kind of adult will she become? It’s not unreasonable that the people around her are worried. That’s probably what her parents are thinking. Am I wrong?”

“Ah, well, you might be right about that.”

Since they were about the same age, Shida could see things from the viewpoint of Yui’s parents. However, was that really a good enough reason for them to check every single book she read? As a middle schooler, she was at an age where she wouldn’t want others to intrude on her life. Things could get complicated.

“Anyway, it would be better if you didn’t get involved in this.

Every family has its own way to raise children…ah, look at the time," said Shida, looking up at the clock.

"Well, then, I'll be off in a moment. I don't want to stay too long when you're closing up."

He abruptly turned on his heels and left, seemingly agitated.

Silence returned to Biblia Books. I turned my head to look at Shinokawa. She looked at the paper in her lap without moving. It looked like she was engrossed in thinking about something. I was also curious about her extended silence. Nao went to Shida for help first, but he couldn't see things from her point of view. I found it strange that Shinokawa hadn't said anything even though this was a discussion about books.

"Is something wrong?"

She looked up suddenly and her hand shook a little when I spoke up.

"N-no…it's just that….well…just a moment."

A strange silence hung in the air. The conversation from earlier was still on my mind.

"Come to think of it, you were saying something earlier before Shida came. What was it?"

Now that I thought about it, her attitude had been strange since she started reading the book report. There was no doubt that something was bothering her. She hesitated a little before answering. Before long, she gathered her resolve and spoke.

"There's something very wrong with this book report."

"Wrong? How so?"

"About what's written here…" she began solemnly.

"The person who wrote this never actually read A Clockwork Orange."

I brought the store sign and wagon inside, locked the glass door, and closed the curtains. The register had been totaled earlier, so my closing duties ended with that.

There was no one else in the shop right now. I returned to the counter and could hear Shinokawa's uneven footsteps upstairs. She had returned to the main house, saying that there were a few things she needed to pick up before she could give me a detailed explanation.

The book report had been placed on the now tidy counter. I glanced over at the title, *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess.

Shinokawa had clearly said that the author of the report didn't actually read the book.

Did that mean that Yui carelessly wrote a report about a book she knew nothing about? I didn't get the impression that she had cut corners with the report when I read it earlier. In the first place, her homeroom teacher or Shida would have noticed if that were the case.

"Thank you for waiting."

Shinokawa had returned from the main house and was leaning on her crutch in the doorway. We moved over to the counter, and faced each other on either side of it. She placed the two paperbacks she was holding under her arm on the countertop. They were two different versions of *A Clockwork Orange* — both of them released by Hayakawa Publishing and translated by Inui Shinichi.

That being said, the books looked completely different. The one on the right featured a man with an evil glint in his eye holding up a knife. The wrapper around it said, "Hayakawa Publishing 50th Anniversary Bestseller." The book itself looked pretty old and the edges of the front cover were stained with dirt.

I looked over to the book on the left. It didn't have anything on it besides the title. Going by the design and the condition of the paper, this was the newer book. The wrapper on this one had "A powerful story! Hayakawa Publishing's 100th Title!" written on it. It looked like both these books were both marketed as masterpieces when they were issued.

"The original Clockwork Orange was published in English in 1962. Although Burgess was a prolific writer who released many books in his time, he is most well-known for this novel, which deals with the subject of youth violence."

Shinokawa suddenly started explaining in an excited tone. The mild demeanor I had become accustomed to was gone. It was almost like she had become a different person.

"Hayakawa Publishing printed the Japanese version in 1971. This book here is the paperback edition of that publication. I think this was actually the most distributed version of the novel in Japan."

She pointed to the book with the picture of a man brandishing a knife.

"Is it worth a lot?"

"Not at all. There were many reprints over the course of several decades, so it doesn't have much value in secondhand bookshops. I would not be surprised to see them gathering dust in a discount bin."

There was a hint of melancholy in her voice.

She set the first book down and pointed to the plainer one on the left.

"This is the new edition that was published in 2008 and is the version sold in bookstores today. The cover art was completely updated and the font size and book size were slightly increased."

It was 2010 now, so this would have happened two years ago. I picked up the two books and compared them. The new edition

looked a little thicker.

“So is there any difference content-wise?”

Shinokawa’s eyes flashed from behind her glasses the moment I asked this. She leaned forward in excitement and placed both her hands on the counter. Her ample chest trembled slightly under her dress.

“There is! There’s a huge difference between the old version and the new version. Take a look at the final page of both versions and compare them please.”

I looked away from her and opened the old version of the book like she asked. I turned to the page where the story ended right before the translator’s afterword. I ran my eyes over the text as quickly as I could before my “condition” could kick in and force me to stop reading:

Oh, it was gorgeosity and yumyumyum. When it came to the Scherzo I could viddy myself very clear running and running on like very light and mysterious nogas, carving the whole litso of the creeching world with my cut-throat britva. And there was the slow movement and the lovely last singing movement still to come.

I was cured all right.

I understood what the text was saying. Just as written in the book report, it ended with the main character listening to Beethoven after being freed from his brainwashing. The few words with furigana on them really stuck out, but I guess that’s just the kind of book it was.

Next, I opened the newer book from the back and quickly began reading one of the pages towards the end. The final passage started on page 310:

And all that cal. A terrible grahzny vonny world, really, O my brothers. And so farewell from your little droog. And to all others in this story profound shooms of lipmusic brrrrrr. And they can kiss my

sharries. But you, O my brothers, remember sometimes thy little Alex that was. Amen. And all that cal.

"Huh?"

This ending was nothing like the one in the first book. I didn't really understand it, but it looked like he was bidding farewell to the reader.

"Why are they so different?"

"Well, that's because…"

Stretching her arm out, Shinokawa flipped back to page 291 and pointed to the end of the page — *"And there was the slow movement and the lovely last singing movement still to come."*

This was the first ending I had read. This time, however, there was a number 7 on the next page, signaling the beginning of, what seemed to be, the final chapter.

"So what happens after this?"

I was trying to sort everything out in my head.

"Did they add an extra chapter to the new version of the book?"

"No, that's not it." She shook her head.

"The new edition is actually the original *A Clockwork Orange*. That is to say, it's the complete version."

She pointed to the area under the title. "The complete edition" was clearly printed there in small text.

"What do you mean?"

This aroused my interest and I unintentionally leaned forward. The distance between us had shrunken considerably, but I wasn't concerned about that right now. Listening to the book's story was more important.

"In the version Burgess published in 1962, the story didn't end when Alex returned to normal."

She continued in a low voice.

“Alex returns to the world of crime and violence, but before long, he gets tired of living that kind of life. At that time, he is reunited with one of his old friends who has completely reformed himself. This prompts Alex to change the way he thinks and abandon the violent lifestyle he had led until then. The story ends with him declaring that he will raise a family and become a proper adult.”

“Huh?”

I raised my voice without thinking.

“In which case, aren’t those endings completely different?”

“Exactly”

Shinokawa vigorously nodded her head. Her forehead almost hit my chin.

“It seems Burgess considered Alex’s violent lifestyle to be an ephemeral phase of his growth. He grows into an adult and becomes able to choose between good and evil on his own. It is essentially a coming of age story.

However, when the book was published in America, the publishing company decided to remove the final chapter.”

“Why did they do that?”

“Perhaps they thought that readers would think it was just a tacked-on happy ending. To make things even more complicated, Stanley Kubrick produced the film using the American version of the novel as its source material.”

I knew who Stanley Kubrick was…I think. I once watched a war movie on TV about a merciless drill instructor whipping new recruits into shape. I forgot the title, but that should have also been directed by Kubrick.

She took the wrapper off the old book and revealed the text

hidden under the picture of the knife wielding man.

“STANLEY KUBRICK’ S A CLOCKWORK ORANGE”

It was written in a larger font than even Burgess’s own name. It somehow looked like Kubrick was the one who had actually written the book.

“This image on the cover was taken from the movie poster. Due to the immense popularity of the film, the novel was translated into many different languages. The Japanese translation, released in 1971, came out at around the same time as the film. It had the same ending as the American version — which the film was based on –- because the original version had not been widely distributed.”

“Why didn’t the original author do anything about this?”

If my novel had part of it cut out and I became famous throughout the world, I would have been unbearably bitter.

“Due to financial reasons, he couldn’t say anything about the American edition. This wasn’t just limited to the American publishing company. In 1970, the version without the final chapter was also released in the author’s native England.

For a long time, this was the only version that was read in Japan, but in 1980, Hayakawa Publishing published the complete version of the book. This meant that, for a while, both the complete version and the incomplete version were distributed at the same time. However, the complete version went out of print after just a few years.”

“Wouldn’t that mean that the incomplete version was the only one being distributed?”

“That’s what ended up happening. Finally, in 2008, the complete version you see here was published, and the previous version was put out of print.”

I crossed my arms and look down at the two books on the

counter. There really was a lot of history behind them.

“There was a period of time when it was unclear which version Burgess considered to be legitimate. Was he just unable to stop them from publishing the incomplete version, or was it that he himself was unable to decide?

However, when the book was published in the United States, he wrote this in the preface:

‘*We can destroy what we have written, but we cannot unwrite it.*’”

My eyes fell to the paper on the counter and Shinokawa suddenly let out a breath. It might have been that she was just sighing, but she also could have been tired from telling the story.

I stared at her face. The depth of her knowledge surprised me time and time again. Of all the people involved in this, she was the only one to notice the difference in versions.

Even Kosuga Yui, who wrote the ——

“Wait a second, that’s strange.”

I turned my head.

“Bookstores nowadays only have the complete version in stock, right?”

The book report didn’t touch on the final chapter at all. It was almost as if it didn’t exist. Did she read the incomplete version or something?

“Maybe she bought it at an antiquarian bookstore…”

If that were the case, it wouldn’t be strange for her not to write about the final chapter. Shinokawa however, shook her head.

“No, that’s not it. Remember, Nao said that she bought the book for her sister from an online book store.”

“Ah, that’s right.”

Which is to say that Yui had the recently published complete

edition. This was becoming more and more incomprehensible.

Shinokawa must have been referring to this when she had said, “The person who wrote this never actually read *A Clockwork Orange*.” But why would Yui do something like that in the first place?

It might not have been directly related to Kosuga Nao’s request, but this inconsistency was concerning. It seemed something else was going on here.

“What should we do?”

I asked Shinokawa. She closed her eyes in order to gather her thoughts.

“I think…we should clear up this issue with the book report first before giving Kosuga any advice.”

I had the same opinion. The problem, however, was how we were going to do that.

“It would be easiest to hear from the author of the report herself.”

Shinokawa and I could either call Yui over to the shop or we could talk to her over the phone. Regardless, we would still need to ask her sister, Nao, to act as an intermediary.

Considering how much she doted on her younger sister, Nao was not going to be happy about Shinokawa’s involvement.

“…But we don’t have to do that right now.”

Shinokawa spoke slowly, carefully choosing her words. Perhaps she had realized the truth behind this situation.

“You’re going to talk to Nao, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Could you also ask her if she would be willing to let me borrow something? There’s something important I want to confirm.”

We closed up shop for the week and two days went by.

We barely had any time for rest when the shop opened the next morning. Despite it being so early in the week, there had already been three large purchases from customers who left with their cars filled to the brim with books. The flow of customers never stopped and that kept us occupied the entire day. By the time things started to settle down, the sun had already begun to set.

Kosuga should be coming any day now.

I thought to myself while restocking the bare bookshelves.

I talked to Nao on the phone yesterday and told her about Shinokawa's request. She asked me all sorts of questions about it, but since I didn't quite understand what was going on myself, I had no answers for her. Regardless, she finally agreed to deliver it to the store after grumbling a bit.

Shinokawa was today, as always, hidden behind a large wall of books. It might have been just me, but the pile of books on the counter felt like it had grown even higher. Shinokawa had been pricing books and working on web orders ever since she had returned from lunch after switching shifts with me.

An oddly shrill whistle suddenly sounded through the quiet shop. It seemed to have come from Shinokawa.

She was probably doing something enjoyable and had started whistling without even realizing it. I put the final book on the shelf and sneaked back to the counter. I had a good idea of what she was up to, but still wanted see it with my own eyes.

I slowly peered over the wall of books and found her sitting in front of the computer intently reading a paperback. She was so absorbed in the book that she didn't even notice me looking at her. Just waiting for her to see me wasn't going to work, so I raised my voice.

“Umm…”

“Hah!?”

She jumped up and turned around, letting out a startled gasp. Her half open lips were pursed in a scowl and she hurriedly closed the book in a fluster. With a snap she sat straight up in her chair. The book she was reading was Ursula K. Le Guin’s *Very Far Away from Anywhere Else* published by Shueisha.

“I-I was working….”

She said, unconvincingly.

There was no reason to bother making excuses for a part-timer like me. In fact, it kind of made me feel like I was at fault here.

“Sorry, I finished restocking”

“Ah, alright. Well then, next you should get the books over there and….”

Just as Shinokawa grabbed her aluminum crutch in her right hand and tried to get up—

“I’m back!”

A high school girl noisily opened the glass door and stepped into the shop. She wore the same school uniform as Kosuga Nao and had a dark tan despite the autumn weather. Her hair was tied in a ponytail.

She may have looked like she belonged on the shores of a southern country, but she was actually the shop owner’s younger sister, Shinokawa Ayaka.

It was rare for her to show up in the shop like this after school. Normally she would go directly to the main house through the back door.

“Aya, welcome back.”

Shinokawa smiled at her younger sister and extended her

crutch-less arm wide. I tilted my head wondering what was going on, when Shinokawa Ayaka suddenly rushed forward and tightly embraced her sister.

She was a little taller than her older sister.

“Uwaah Shioriko!”

Ayaka let out an uncharacteristically loud cry and rubbed her cheek against the nape of Shinokawa’s neck. Both of them were smiling from ear to ear. I looked away, feeling embarrassed just watching. What the heck was all this about anyway?

“Alright, time to make dinner.”

After about five seconds, Ayaka let go of her sister as if nothing at all had happened.

“See ya, Goura.”

She lightly greeted me before leaving for the main house.

“What….was that just now?”

I asked Shinokawa when it was just the two of us again. Come to think of it, I didn’t see the two Shinokawa sisters together often. Was this something they always did?

“That was a greeting…?”

Shinokawa blinked in confusion.

“You guys greet each other like that every day?”

“Eh? You don’t do this at your house?”

She said that as if it were the most natural thing in the world. Had the practice of hugging each other taken root in Japanese society while I wasn’t watching?

“No, we don’t do that at my house.”

The Goura household was composed of just my mother and me. Both of us were uncommonly well built. It would probably make more sense if we hugged each other when I was small. However, if

we tried it today, it wouldn't look like anything but a sumo match to an outside observer.

"I see…"

Her voice fell a little.

"My sister and I have done it this way for a long time…because our parents weren't around."

"Eh?"

The previous owner of the shop, the Shinokawa sister's father, should have been alive until last year. She must have noticed the dubious expression on my face as she quickly smiled and clarified.

"Ah, of course, he was physically around, but he wasn't the type to be intimate with his daughters, you see."

I began to feel a little uneasy. It may have been that way with her father, but –

"What about your mother?"

Come to think of it, I had never heard any stories about Shinokawa's mother. I had a feeling she hadn't ever mentioned her mother even once.

"10 years ago….."

She didn't continue the explanation and I didn't get to hear what happened. Perhaps she didn't want to talk about it. At any rate, it meant that Shinokawa's mother wasn't around anymore.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry."

I dropped the subject.

"It's alright…"

I lost the chance to continue the conversation and an uneasy silence remained.

It was then that we heard the sound of noisy, boisterous

footsteps approaching. The door leading to the main house opened and Shinokawa Ayaka appeared once again. She looked like she was in the middle of changing, with only one of her socks on.

“I almost forgot. Take this. It’s from Kosuga.”

She said, pushing a checkered paper bag into my hands. It wasn’t sealed, but judging by appearances alone, it looked like it could have contained a present.

I tilted my head.

“From Kosuga?”

“Kosuga Nao, you know her, right? She had some errands to take care of today and asked me to hand this over to you.”

“Not that. You and Kosuga know each other?”

I heard from Kosuga that she never talked with Shinokawa’s younger sister. They were in the same grade, but different classes.

“I already knew her from before. She’s pretty cool, so she stands out. I got to know her through the culture festival committee. Turns out we went to the same elementary school, but different middle schools.”

“Ah, that’s how it was.”

Now that she mentioned it, both of them must have been in the same school district. It wouldn’t be strange for people born and raised in the same area to go the same schools. And even if they never talked, they’d probably see each other around.

“We were also in the same class three years ago, isn’t that cool!?”

“No, you two should’ve realized this much sooner.”

“Anyway, she said to take this seriously or she’d kick you to death. Well, something like that anyway.”

With a smile, she passed on this disturbing message and ran

back into the main house. She didn't need to do everything while running, I thought.

"Would it be alright if I took a look at it?" Shinokawa asked.

Thankfully, the atmosphere had returned to normal. I gave her the bag and she took out its contents. Hayakawa Publishing's *A Clockwork Orange* by Anthony Burgess.

So this was the copy of *A Clockwork Orange* that Kosuga Yui had asked her sister to buy for her. The brand new book, which gave off the smell of paper and had the [complete edition] printed on its cover.

"As expected, the last chapter was included in her copy." I said.

Shinokawa continued to wordlessly flip through the pages. We were able to confirm which version Kosuga Yui had, but the mystery still remained. Why didn't she include anything about the final chapter in her book report?

"I knew it."

I heard her low murmur. With the book still open, Shinokawa stopped her hand.

"I think I know what happened now."

"Eh?"

I responded.

"What did you find?"

She placed her finger on a folded up piece of paper that was caught between the pages like a bookmark.

Underneath the text that said "Hayakawa Books request card" was a field containing the distributor and shop name. The title of the book was as also printed on the paper alongside a barcode. She pinched the semicircular tab at the top of the slip and pulled it out of the book.

“Do you know what this is?”

“Err…I might have seen something like it before but….”

I didn’t really understand why she was asking this.

She cleared her throat once and smoothly began her explanation.

“This slip is something that’s used for inventory control.”

I nodded wordlessly. I still didn’t get how that was related to the book report.

“Even in secondhand bookshops, this slip is something to check for. If you get a new-looking book that still has a slip in it, you should pay attention. Normally, bookstores take these slips out, so if you see one it might mean that the book was stolen.

I was taken aback.

“That means…this book…”

No, I was certain Nao had said that she bought it from an online bookstore. It didn’t make any sense for a book that was ordered online to be shoplifted.

Or possibly there was another side to this story.

“Umm. Not exactly. That doesn’t necessarily mean that this particular book was stolen.”

My wild imagination withered.

“There are more and more bookstores nowadays that don’t even use these slips. Instead, they read the data they need from the barcode. At least that’s how large online bookstores do it. If that’s how it was, she still could have purchased the book with the slip inside. “

“I see.”

If that was the case, there nothing wrong with seeing the slip still inside the book. In fact, it supported Kosuga Nao’s story that the

book was sold out at her neighborhood bookstore and that she bought it online instead.

However, Shinokawa had an uncertain expression on her face.

“The truth is, there’s one more thing I figured out…it was something I wanted to ascertain by borrowing this book….”

She touched the slip with the tip of her pale finger. She didn’t look very happy about the conclusion she had reached.

“Could you ask Nao’s younger sister to come here in person? If possible, I would like to talk to her alone.

Face to face.”

Arranging a meeting between Kosuga Yui and Shinokawa ended up taking a couple of days. We would have preferred to get in touch with Yui directly, but since she didn’t own a computer or a cell phone, we had to go through her sister, Nao. Negotiating with Nao also slowed things down some.

She suspected that we were more interested in the contents of the book report than persuading her parents.

“What does Shinokawa actually want to talk about!? Spit it out!”

Even if she pressed me like that, I had no way to answer. I just kept repeating that Shinokawa really wanted to talk with Yui face to face.

“In that case, I’m going to come along as well.”

I only noticed this after seeing Nao’s repeated displays of concern for Yui. She still hadn’t told us anything at all about her younger sister’s reaction to all this. Yui probably would not have been happy to learn that Nao was working for her sake.

“Can you just ask Yui herself? You can also ask her if she needs a chaperone then.”

***

It wasn't long before we received a message from Kosuga Yui. It said that she wanted to meet with Shinokawa alone.

Yui's arranged meeting time was on a weekday morning before the shop opened. She apparently already knew where Biblia Books was located. I worked faster than usual and finished up the morning preparations with Shinokawa early in order to prepare for our guest.

The place where the two of them were supposed to have their talk also had a spot prepared for me. Nao had asked me to sit in on their meeting.

"Yui said she would be alright by herself, but I'm still worried. Could you give her support, just in case she needs it?"

She probably had a vague idea of what was going to happen; there was a good chance that this was not going to be a pleasant conversation. The atmosphere resembled the time Kosuga had been summoned by Shinokawa to be questioned about the book she once stole.

Shinokawa was a bit bewildered by my presence, but she accepted it once Yui said that it was okay as well.

"Is today a foundation day or something?"

I asked her while looking up at the clock on the wall. Yui didn't seem like the type of person who would skip school to come here.

"It might be a compensatory holiday for the school festival. "

Shinokawa answered right away and I nodded, not really convinced.

"How do you know that?"

"Because I also used to attend Seiri Academy"

This was the first I had heard of this. However, her having gone to an all-girls school did explain a few things. Particularly why she

was so oblivious to men's glances. Today she was wearing a light colored knitted V-neck but — wait, no, that's enough.

"Did you go to an all-girls school for college as well? A mission school, perhaps?"

"Hah? How did you know!?" Her eye went wide behind her glasses.

"Just a hunch."

That was all I could say as I looked at her. Her personality had surely been like this since long ago.

"I see… I went to a public elementary school, but after that it was all girls schools."

I nodded as I listened. I wanted to hear more about her past, but our conversation was cut short by the sound of a glass door opening.

A ponytailed girl with metal framed glasses entered the shop. She was wearing a white denim jacket over a one piece checkered dress, her hair tied with a single decorated rubber band. Despite the casual style, the outfit looked like it fit completely within her school's dress code.

"I'm here, just like my sister said," Kosuga Yui spoke.

She said this in a formal and openly wary tone. Her faintly rugged features didn't really resemble that of her older sister's.

"W-welcome…..over here, please…"

Shinokawa was still seated behind the counter and urged Yui over in subdued tones. It looked like this middle schooler was making her nervous. Really, there had to be a limit to how nervous she could get around strangers.

Yui stepped inside the shop, and neatly closed the front door. I wordlessly moved out of the way and leaned on a glass case. I considered this to ultimately be a conversation between the two of

them.

“My name’s Kosuga Yui.”

“Thank you…..for taking the trouble to….”

The delicate conversation started out on the wrong foot. Shinokawa, the adult, had forgotten to introduce herself.

“What did you call me here for?”

Yui stopped in the aisle and looked towards us coldly, her arms crossed. She may have looked different from her sister, but she shared the same strong personality.

“I don’t want to spend too much time here.”

“I see…umm…”

“Nobody asked you people to butt into my business.”

We were taken aback by her derisive tone.

“You want to talk about the book? What would you know?.”

Yui’s words seemed to reflect her annoyance at her sister for getting us involved. The gap between the sisters was a lot deeper than I had thought it was. No, perhaps this was just the younger sister’s one-sided hatred.

“Isn’t Nao doing all of this for your sake?”

“I didn’t ask her to do any of this. I’m fine with having the books I buy checked by our parents. But seeing her argue with them day after day is just annoying.”

It was almost like saying that her sister’s efforts were pointless.

“Why does my book report matter anyway? It would be easier to just let it go.”

“I have four questions for you,” Shinokawa suddenly said in a carrying voice. It was almost as if a switch had been pressed. She had completely changed from timid to bold.

“Did you write this book report at your house?”

“I did.”

Yui looked a little bewildered by Shinokawa’s sudden change, but she obediently answered.

“I normally do my homework at home.”

“Do you often use the library?”

“No…touching books that other people have used…feels uncomfortable.”

Yui took a fleeting glance at the bookshelves to her left. Her words could have been interpreted as provocative in an antiquarian bookshop. She looked docile on the outside, but she had a lot of guts.

“You don’t lend or borrow books from your friends then?”

“I don’t. My friends don’t really read books.”

“What about your family?”

There was a slight pause.

“I can borrow books from my family…but that rarely happens. The people in my family don’t really like reading. At the most they’ll read magazines, but that’s about it.”

That wasn’t right. Her sister Nao should have been borrowing and reading books from Shida lately. It seemed she didn’t count as someone who liked books.

“Is that so? I see…”

“Are we done then? I need to go.”

“I’m sorry, I have one more question for you.” Shinokawa raised her index finger.

“How did you write that book report?”

The inside of the shop became deathly silent. Once again, Kosuga

Yui looked like she didn't understand the significance of the question, but her eyes went wide.

"...by reading the book. That's my book over there right? It's the one I read."

She indicated towards the counter. On top of it was the complete edition of A Clockwork Orange that Nao had lent us.

"This novel had two different endings. The incomplete version that ends when Alex is freed from his brainwashing, and the complete version where Alex decides to reform himself out of his own volition. If you really read the complete version, why did you write your book report about the incomplete version?"

Shinokawa finally got to the heart of the matter. Given the circumstances, Yui should have been trembling in her boots. However, she seemed quite calm.

She was oddly mature, and smiled fearlessly before talking.

"The final chapter wasn't really interesting so I just decided to ignore it. It felt strange that Alex became a good person so quickly... The ending where Alex listens to Beethoven was a lot cooler."

It was a logical explanation, but something still felt off. It seemed like she had adapted and made a good excuse after learning of the final chapter.

"'I could viddy myself very clear running and running on like very light and mysterious nogas, carving the whole litso of the creeching world with my cut-throat britva. And there was the slow movement and the lovely last singing movement still to come.'"

Shinokawa quoted the book from memory without hesitating and smiled at Kosuga Yui.

"Certainly a good ending. I was also frightened by it the first time I read the book and thought it was a splendid story."

“Right, and that’s why in my book report….”

“-but you didn’t even read that far into the book, did you?”

“Eh?”

The one who raised his voice was me. Kosuga Yui herself only frowned a little.

“It isn’t like that. I really did read the entire thing.”

“Really?”

“It’s true. You’re saying that I didn’t read it, but do you even have any proof?”

Kosuga Yui didn’t think that Shinokawa would be able to prove anything. However, Shinokawa was unperturbed and held out the copy of *A Clockwork Orange* that was on the counter to Kosuga Yui.

“Could you look through the book, starting from the first couple pages? It doesn’t matter even if you skim it…go ahead.”

Shinokawa’s tone said she wouldn’t take no for an answer, so the girl reluctantly complied.

Yui snatched her book back and began flipping through the pages. Suddenly the movement stopped. There was a pink slip inserted dozens of pages into the book. She innocently pinched the semicircular tab and pulled the slip out.

“Were you able to read the entire book without pulling out that slip?”

The girl’s fingers stopped.

I finally understood. She would not have been able to read the pages the slip was stuck between without pulling it out. There probably weren’t many people who would insert the slip back in after intentionally pulling it out.

So this is what Shinokawa meant when she said that she understood one more thing from seeing the slip. She could tell

whether or not the book's owner had read through it.

"You did not read this book to the end. The reason why you didn't realize that there was a different ending in your complete version was that you stopped reading before you finished the book. Despite that, you were still able to write the book report, which leaves only one possible explanation."

Shinokawa took a deep breath and said it clearly.

"You copied someone else's book report."

There was still some time until the store opened for the day. The only thing that could be heard was the sound of the ticking clock. Before long, Kosuga Yui, her face drained of all color, began to speak.

"Don't be ridiculous." She was shaking a little, but her tone was unexpectedly forceful.

"Are you saying that I copied someone else's report?"

Shinokawa was taken aback and frowned. She must not have expected to be talked back to.

"...In that case, I'll ask you one more question. Where did you first hear about *A Clockwork Orange*?"

"Huh?"

Yui was surprised. She looked as if she had been stung.

"This book certainly is a classic title, but it's a novel that was published overseas more than fifty years ago. Where did you, who doesn't discuss literature with her friends or family, learn about it? Why did you decide to write a report on this particular book?"

"That is...I happened to see it in a book store and...."

"It should have been out of stock at your neighborhood bookstore. Besides, you wrote here that you 'bought this book

without even knowing what kind of story it was'".

Shinokawa did not let up. "It was, in truth, the opposite, wasn't it? You read this book report first, and then decided to read *A Clockwork Orange* after it caught your interest.

I'm sure you tried writing the book report on your own in the beginning. You wouldn't have otherwise searched for and bought the book if you didn't mean write your own report. However, since the report was going badly, you had no choice but to copy this one as a last resort."

"What you're saying is completely ridiculous! You don't even have any proof!"

"You'll see what my proof is soon enough." Shinokawa maintained an unperturbed expression even in the face of Yui's outburst.

"You said that you wrote this book report at home, right? You also said that you didn't use the library. If that's true, then the original book report must have been something you found in your own home. Of course, it wasn't something that one of your family members wrote in the past.

If that were the case, you would have been found out right away. However, there is more than one possible explanation…"

Shinokawa calmly continued speaking in a lecturing tone.

"The elementary school you attended had a book report competition every year, correct? The winning entries should have been compiled into an anthology which was then distributed to all the students."

Yui's face froze. Suddenly what Nao had said a few days ago came back to me.

Personally, I think Yui's writing was always better than what the other kids submitted.

I had thought that what she said back then was odd. There's no way Nao would have gotten the chance to personally compare her sister's book report against all the others. That is, unless she looked through the anthology.

"Of course, the competition existed before you started attending that school and the old anthologies should have also been distributed to the students. This book report was definitely written at a point time when the complete version of *A Clockwork Orange* had not yet been released. It was probably written by someone who attended the school at the same time as your older brother or sister.

Since Nao didn't notice anything, there's a good chance that it was written by someone who went to the school at the same time as your eldest brother. From there, I was able to begin my investigation."

For a brief moment, nobody uttered a word.

Yui, who had been tightly gripping her copy of A Clockwork Orange, suddenly let her hand down, as if all the strength had left it.

"It's because I thought no one understood me," She began to murmur, her head hanging down in shame.

"I like reading through the book reports in the old anthologies to find new things to read. There are normally one or two people who write really incredible reports every year. What surprised me the most while reading through the book reports was *A Clockwork Orange*. It was well written, and the contents were cool and mature. I thought it was great."

So that meant that there was someone out there who had read this book as an elementary schooler and written a report about it. I guess there would always be children with an uncommon love for books, no matter when or where. Perhaps there was someone like that around me as well.

“I wanted to try the book out for myself, but when I started reading it…Alex was a lot crueler than I thought he would be, and used a lot of difficult words. I stopped reading about a third of the way through.”

Her sister, Nao, had said the exact same thing. The two sisters were unexpectedly similar when it came to taste in books.

“But why did you need to copy the book report?” Shinokawa asked.

“That’s what I don’t understand. If you couldn’t read *A Clockwork Orange*, why didn’t you use another book for your report?”

Yui’s face flushed red.

For a moment, she seemed very young. Or more accurately, she actually looked her age for once.

“It’s because my sister…umm…told me that she couldn’t read this kind of book.”

“Eh?” Shinokawa replied.

“…My sister got a boyfriend recently”

Shinokawa and I glanced at each other without thinking. It was like she was asking me if it was someone I knew. I shook my head no way.

Nao tried to confess to one of her classmates last month, but she was harshly turned down. That wound up being the beginning of the whole thieving incident. The boy who turned her down ended up being ostracized in school, and tried to burn down the Biblia store sign out of resentment. I heard he was still suspended from school, even now.

“She had been making cakes over the summer and went out a lot. I guess she confessed and it went well. He seemed to be a very smart person since she always borrowed difficult looking books from him. It was almost as if she had gotten more into books than

I was.”

My head started to hurt while listening to her. This girl had completely misunderstood everything. The person who Nao exchanged books with wasn’t anything like a boyfriend. It was a homeless book hunter who was older than her parents.

I thought about pointing this out, but decided not to. It would be improper for an outsider like me to reveal something that Nao hadn’t even told her own family.

“…So you wanted to show your sister that you could read books even she couldn’t handle,” Shinokawa said seriously.

All of a sudden, Yui lowered her head deeply.

“Please don’t tell my sister about this. She has a surprisingly strong sense of duty, so I know she’ll definitely tell my parents about it. It would be really bad if that happened.”

“But…”

“I know what I did was wrong, but only my parents and my teacher have seen the report. Even the person who wrote the original hasn’t realized it yet, so if you keep silent as well…”

“Kosuga Yui,” Shinokawa suddenly called out. Her voice had a weight that made Yui shut her mouth.

“You took a book report from someone who graduated long ago and passed if off as your own. Even if the original author herself doesn’t know, the fact that you copied it still remains. Moreover, you submitted a report about a book that you didn’t read. I think that’s an insult to the original author. Don’t you like reading books?”

Shinokawa placed her hand on her lap behind the counter. I noticed that she was stroking the cover of a book. It was the old copy of *A Clockwork Orange* with the yellow wrapper around it. It was the book she had shown to me earlier while explaining everything.

“As Burgess said, ‘We can destroy what we have written, but we cannot unwrite it.’ You too cannot undo the fact that you copied this book report. You need to take responsibility.”

Yui pressed her lips together and reflected upon this. She seemed frightened of what was going to happen next.

“You need to confess everything to your sister and ask her what to do. That’s all I can tell you.”

“Ehhhh?”

“I’m sure your sister will wrap things up in a way that’s best for you. She should definitely understand how you feel.”

Nao of all people would understand the feelings of someone who did something they shouldn’t have. Moreover, she really cared for her sister.

At last, Kosuga Yui quietly raised her head.

“I understand….that’s what I’ll do.”

There isn’t much else to say about what happened with Yui. Kosuga Nao never gave us any details on what happened afterward.

A few days passed and a thank you letter addressed to Shinokawa arrived at the shop. It looked like things ended up just fine for her. Perhaps she managed to settle everything without telling her parents.

I happened to run into the Kosuga sisters at the Ofuna station bookstore the other day. They were in the paperback corner with their heads near each other, talking happily. It certainly looked like they had become closer.

Although I did say there wasn’t much else to the story, the truth is that I discovered one more piece to the puzzle before all this wrapped up. It happened the day after Kosuga Yui left the shop.

It was just past noon and Shinokawa had gone over to the main house for her lunch break. One of our regular customers had just left after stopping by to say hello, so I was left alone in the shop.

My eyes happened to land on the copy of *A Clockwork Orange* that had been left forgotten on the counter. It was the old version of the book with the missing final chapter.

Shinokawa had brought this book from the second floor of the main house. It wasn't part of the store's inventory. Rather, it came out of her own personal book collection. I read the text on the book wrapper once again, "Hayakawa Publishing 50th Anniversary."

When on earth did she buy this book?

I flipped a couple pages and looked at the copyright information, "October 5th, 1995. 25th printing." It was even older than I expected — exactly 15 years old. Of course, it was possible that Shinokawa bought it at a used bookstore, but assuming she bought it new…

"Ah," I suddenly blurted out.

The doubts lingering in my mind since yesterday suddenly came together, and I remembered what Shinokawa had said:

Even if the author herself didn't realize it, the fact that you copied the book report remains.

I thought about it a lot, and at no point did Yui say that the author of the original book report was a girl. There was always the possibility that it was a guy.

Moreover, both the Shinokawa family and the Kosuga family lived in the same school district. Since Shinokawa herself had said that she went to a public elementary school, it would be reasonable to assume that she attended the same school as Yui and her siblings. Why didn't she say anything about that?

"I made you wait, my apologies."

I raised my head to see where the voice was coming from. Shinokawa had returned from the main house and was closing the door with her hand behind her.

“I was…just…looking for something.”

She noticed the book I had open and gulped. Even so, she steeled herself and decided to approach me anyway.

“I…have something I need to apologize to you about…” As she began to talk, I was surprised to see her look me directly in the eye.

She took a booklet out from under her arm and presented it to me. This was probably the item she had been looking for earlier.

The book was titled *Mebuki*, which probably came from the word for “buds sprout.” Underneath that it said, “Kamakura city, Iwatani Elementary School, 7th year of the Showa era.” In other words, 1995.

I wordlessly accepted it and flipped through the pages until I got to the table of contents. Everything compiled there was a book report. Mebuki was probably the anthology that published the book report competition. I quickly found the entry I was looking for.

A Clockwork Orange

My eye fell to the next line. —– *Year 3, Class 2. Shinokawa Shioriko.*

“I’m sorry.” She lowered hear head, her face bright red.

“That…was my book report.”

So that’s how it was.

Shinokawa didn’t solve this puzzle through reasoning this time. She was aware of what Yui had done since the very beginning and only pretended to solve the mystery.

“Why didn’t you say anything right at the start?” There shouldn’t

have been any reason to hide the truth.

There also wouldn't have been any need to provide a drawn out explanation to Kosuga Yui. If Shinokawa had just shown Yui this anthology and declared that this was her book report, everything would have been settled.

"That's because…well…." she said, her voice tapering out towards the end.

"T-that's because you said…"

Me? What did I say?

"When Shida said, 'If she's like this in middle school, what kind of adult will she become?', you agreed with him."

"Ah."

Shinokawa wasn't in middle school when she wrote the book report, she was in elementary school. Neither Shida nor I realized it at the time, but the "adult" that the writer grew up to be had been right in front of us all along.

"When I wrote this book report, my teachers talked to me about it as well. Of course it would be worrying to see a child write an essay like this. The report still got placed into the anthology since there were also teachers who stuck up for me, but…."

Her voice had grown even quieter.

"It upset me that you thought so as well."

Come to think of it, she had been trying to say something right before Shida showed up. She had definitely been planning to tell me about everything back then.

My eyes looked back to the first line of the book report.

I bought this book from the Shimano bookstore without knowing what kind of story it was.

This was the only part that was different from Kosuga Yui's

report. Shinokawa must have bike to the bookstore right after getting her allowance.

This time I could imagine what that would've looked like.

"What would you think about a child who wrote an essay like this?"

I turned to another page of *Mebuki* and quickly ran my eyes over the other essays. There were modern literature book reports for books by Mori Ougai, Daizai Osamu and the like. Shinokawa's report definitely stuck out amongst them.

"I'd think it was unusual, but not that it was necessarily bad," I answered.

"I would have liked to meet the younger you."

Shinokawa smiled bashfully.

While it may be true that an elementary school kid wrote a book report like this, so what? Book reports were just that, book reports. Whatever actions someone took after reading them was entirely up to them. Even in this book, didn't Alex decide to graduate from evil all on his own?

I closed *Mebuki* and returned it to her. Like Burgess said, you can't unwrite what you have written. However, there was no need to unwrite this one.

"Now that you've also read the complete version, what do you think of it?"

"Eh?"

"I want to know what you think about it now."

Of course, her impressions should have changed now that she knew about the other ending. What did the Shinokawa of today think of the novel? I was more interested in that than anything else.

Shinokawa's smile became even wider.

“Well, this will take a while but….”

“Then should we close the shop for today?”

“Ah, of course.”

We both began tidying up the shop. She went towards the stacks of books on the counter whistling like she always did.

Although this time, it wasn’t because she was reading a book.

Chapter 2

Fukuda, Sadaichi. Essay of Wise Sayings – Salaryman. June Paperback

I had to circle around the shop in order to get the car lined up on front of it. Turning onto the T shaped road, I drove down the narrow street parallel to the train station. I soon saw a tall, bespectacled woman with long hair standing of front of a sign that said “Purchasing of old books, providing honest valuation.” The autumn combo of her fur muffler and jacket, worn over a long dress was thrown off by the workman’s canvas bag hanging from her shoulder.

I parked the car in front of her, and stretched out my hand to open the passenger seat.

“Sorry for the wait.”

As I said this, she stooped a little to enter the car. She awkwardly folded her crutch and put on her seatbelt, holding her bag tightly on her lap.

“Ready to go?” I raised my voice, unable to calm my nerves.

“Yes…let’s go.”

I lowered the hand brake and slowly started to move the car.

The ground was speckled with autumn hues as we neared the gates of the Engaku Temple. Throngs of middle aged tourists crossed the road, keeping the car stuck in place – a common occurrence during excursion season in Kamakura.

“This is our first time, isn’t it?” said Shinokawa.

“What do you mean?”

“Going out together like this.”

I fell silent for a moment. It was certainly as she said. We hardly ever left the shop together like this.

But my heart wasn't really fluttering at the thought.

"I might ask you to go alone sometime in the future. Not right away, but please pay attention and learn how this is done."

"Got it." I quietly nodded.

Despite what it looked like, this wasn't a date or anything like that. We were actually in the old van that normally sat in the parking spot behind the bookshop. The back seats were folded down so there would be enough space if we had to take back a large number of books.

"The place we're going to is in Onarimachi, right?"

"Right. It's a pretty large house. I was told it has its own library."

Onarimachi was a residential area near Kamakura Station. We were currently on our way there to purchase books as part of our "in home purchasing" program.

I crossed the railroad tracks and began to accelerate as I got onto the highway. I drove behind an orange colored transit bus and up a gently sloping hill.

"Have you been to this house before?"

I was startled for a moment.

"Well…we were in the same class so…"

It wasn't really a lie. I got a request from a high school classmate who wanted us to buy some books from her personal collection. That's why we were going to her house house right now.

However, the situation was actually little more complicated than that, and it was making us both somewhat nervous.

It all started two days ago.

There's a small shopping district near the Ofuna station that's

been there since forever. The shopping district is filled with long, narrow streets and shops bustling with evening customers. Products overflow all the way out to the road which makes it difficult to pass without bumping your shoulder into something.

There are plenty of shops selling fresh food and daily necessities, but as you go further away from the station, the bars with signs advertising alcohol become more prominent. As the day comes to an end, the taverns start up business, one by one and salarymen returning home from work along begin with gather along with others in the neighborhood.

When this all began, I had been drinking at one of those bars. The seafood snacks were plentiful and otherwise cheap. That day I was with a friend from my high school days.

“Are you still working there? At the old bookshop?”

Sawamoto, the friend I was with, said as the beer came in, filled to the brim. There were only two people who had been in the same class as me for all three years of high school, and this man was one of them.

“I left at one point, but a lot of things happened and I went back.”

“Hm? When we last talked, you said that you only had the final interview left for that food company in Saitama.”

I wordlessly shook my head. He smiled to smooth things over, probably guessing what had happened.

“Well, I’m glad I’ve still got someone left from my hometown to drink with. There aren’t many people who would meet up to drink with me besides you.”

Before I even realized it, Sawamoto had already drained his mug.

On top of being strong with alcohol, his facial features were so finely chiseled it was almost frustrating. Sawamoto came from a family with generations of fisherman and fishmongers. He used to

be captain of the Kendo club and was like a reliable older brother to our high school class.

He failed his national exams once, but made it into a national university nevertheless. After that, he decided to join a foreign electronics company.

“If you’re at the store, then there’s probably nothing to worry about. There was some trouble, right? I heard the owner was assaulted by a stalker.”

My eyes went wide. “You know quite a lot.”

More accurately, the stalker hadn’t been after Shinokawa Shioriko herself. He was after the rare Dazai Osamu book that she owned. The stalker, Tanaka Toshio, was arrested, and an account of the arrest, which included his full name, was published in the newspaper.

Shinokawa and the shop’s name should not have been included in the report.

“It’s an incident that happened in my hometown. Isn’t it natural that there would at least be rumors?” Sawamoto said loudly.

“What happened to the perpetrator?”

“The trial is still ongoing, but it seems he’s in jail right now.”

I wondered how many years he would stay in prison. Of course, he wouldn’t get a life sentence, which meant that we couldn’t ignore the possibly of Tanaka approaching Shinokawa again.

“So you’re going out with the shop owner then? She’s quite the beauty, isn’t she?”

I scowled and put down my mug. Was something like that also part of the rumors? No, it was just that Sawamoto’s information network was pointlessly broad.

“I’m not going out with her, I just work in the shop.”

“That’s odd…the story I heard was that you confessed to her after

catching the criminal…”

“The story you heard was wrong, there was no confession, but the book…”

“Book…?”

“No, never mind.”

There was the story of how she gave me the book in an attempt to reconcile, but explaining that properly would be difficult.

“But it’s not like you’re *just* her part timer, right? There has to be something.”

“…I wonder about that.”

She rarely talked about anything besides books. I couldn’t really get a sense of the distance between us, and didn’t really know how much I should delve into her personal affairs. I had never met anyone like her before. Sawamoto scrunched his large eyebrows together. It looked like there was something worrying him.

“What’s wrong?”

“I was talking to someone about a month ago when the conversation turned to you. I said that you were working at an antiquarian bookshop, and also ended up saying that you managed to get a girlfriend.”

“Who did you tell that to?”

“Kousaka.”

I was trying to reach for the edamame, but stopped my hand. Kousaka Akiho. Other than Sawamoto, she was the only person I had shared a class with for all 3 years of highschool.

“So you keep in touch?”

“I call and send her emails every once in a while.”

There was a whirlpool of questions spinning in my head. Just as I opened my mouth, the beer refills and fried mackerel were

delivered to the table. Sawamoto tapped on the bread with his hands as if he were thinking of something.

“Right, right. I even got an email from her yesterday. She said a relative of hers passed away, so she was going to be in the area.”

Sawamoto bit into his fried fish and held up his beer.

“She said that she might show up when I told her I was going drinking with you.”

“Ehh…”

I almost dropped my chopsticks. The displeasure must have also shown on my face.

“Is that a problem?”

“It’s nothing like that, but…”

I couldn’t prepare my heart so quickly. It had been three, no maybe four years since we last met. It felt like it had already been a decade though.

Well, that didn’t necessarily mean she would actually come. Maybe she would be busy with her relative’s funeral…I was telling myself that when –

“It’s nothing like that, but what?”

I suddenly turned around to see slender woman was standing there. Her blue dress and beige coat were certainly appropriate for formal family occasions. Her shoulder length hair had a gentle wave, and she was wearing light makeup.

“Daisuke, it’s been too long.”

Kousaka Akiho flashed her white teeth. The way she smiled hadn’t changed at all from long ago.

Sawamoto and I first got to know each other because our names were near each other in the class roster. That was also the reason

why our assigned seats were initially near each other. Kousaka Akiho's seat might have also been near mine, but I don't really remember. She had already cheerfully joined in on our conversations before I even realized it.

She had protruding pale lips and wasn't by any means someone who attracted a lot of attention. She did, however have a clear and carrying voice. Her responses were gentle, yet firm, and she occasionally said some surprising things. She had an air of maturity that other girls her age lacked.

Unlike Sawamoto who was kept occupied by kendo club activities, Akiho and I didn't belong to any club. Although we often went to the family restaurant in front of Ofune station where she worked, we only really became close at the beginning of summer vacation during our second year of high school. We used to meet up at the library and finish our homework there.

Sawamoto started going out with an underclassman girl from the kendo club, and the two of us ended up spending more time together as a result. We didn't have any pastimes in common, and since both of us didn't speak much, just conversing about what happened at school was enough. But by the time autumn rolled around, we had already become nigh inseparable. There were already rumors that we were going out before we even realized our own feelings for each other. It wasn't until winter that the rumors reached our ears. Unlike me, who became flustered, Akiho kept her cool.

She was completely unreadable. Then one day, as we headed home from school, she suddenly spoke up.

"After exams are over, why don't we start going out?"

I think I was shocked speechless at the time and only somehow managed to stammer out a response. That was the first time we mutually affirmed our feelings.

Typical of a couple studying for exams, we were well behaved

for the most part. Sometimes we would take a detour when going to cram school and continue behind the abandoned factory with our hands held. Akiho's hands were much smaller and warmer than I thought they would be.

In the spring of the following year, I somehow managed to get into the economics department of some nameless school and Akiho received an acceptance letter from a public university's literature department. However, she ended up choosing to be a photography major in the fine arts department at a private school. Her declaration that she would become a photographer at any cost shocked me and everyone around us.

I knew she would sometimes bring a large SLR camera with her on dates, and that she used to buy replacement lenses at her part time job. However, I was certain that it was just a hobby.

I think it was around then that I first began to notice the cracks forming in our relationship. Why didn't Akiho tell me anything about this? Did I really not understand her at all? Despite that, I was happy we were released from our exams, and the unease soon disappeared from my mind.

Kousaka Akiho didn't like to talk about her family. Her parents were divorced and she lived with her father. She and her father did not get along. That was about the extent of what I heard – bits and pieces like that.

Her curfew was strict to the point of being annoying. Even when she started attending school in Tokyo, she had to be back in Kamakura by 8pm, no matter what. The campus was in Nerima, Tokyo and it took 3 hours for her to get there and back. She pretty much had no free time during weekdays.

Despite being unhappy with it, Akiho still abided by her curfew. However, she did slip up one day when were on a date at Motomachi in Yokohama. We went to see an old church on a hill, and ended up getting lost on the way back. She hurried and got on

the Negishi Line, but by the time she got back to Kamakura, it was already too late. 8pm had passed.

I ignored her insistence that just taking her to the station was enough, and decided to escort her all the way to her house. She lived in a residential area of Onarimachi, and I was shocked to see the huge mansion she called home. The massive gate and Japanese landscape garden were shocking enough, but what really surprised me was the family member there waiting for her.

A short old man stood ramrod straight on the stepping stones with his arms crossed. His short grey hair and tailored, dark colored Japanese clothing looked good on him. This was most likely her father, the head of the household. His cold gaze was chilling.

“Pleased to meet you. My name is Goura Daisuke.”

Of course, I didn’t show up here just to turn back. I lowered my head deeply.

“I got lost today and ended up dragging Akiho along with me. I’d like to apologize.”

There was no response.

I timidly raised my head and the old man jerked his chin at my girlfriend and returned to the house. She followed him inside in a half-run and was left standing alone outside the gate. Thinking back on it, I believe that night was the turning point in our relationship.

Kousaka Akiho moved out of her home and began living alone, closer to Tokyo just before the rainy season began. Just the fact that she was now free to do whatever she wanted made me happy since no one could intrude or deny us the sweet time we spent together.

However, after she moved out, our time together actually decreased.

She apparently had to pay for her own living expenses, causing her to work several part time jobs at once. Around this time, I also entered the university Judo club and spent a lot of my time training with the goal of obtaining a belt.

Since it had become harder for us to visit each other, the interval of time between dates slowly began to increase. The few times we were actually able to meet up, she looked worn out and was smiling less and less.

If she had said something about her exhaustion and dissatisfaction then, perhaps we could have dealt with it. However, she didn't like to show other people her vulnerabilities. In all the time we were going out, I can't remember her ever asking for advice. I also felt that there was nothing I could do to understand her. Had we been children, it would have been simple, but as it was then, I had no idea how to bridge the gap between us in one go.

That summer of awkward inaction passed, and I didn't so much as receive a text from her as autumn ended and winter began. Although she never said anything, it was certain that this relationship was over. Even so, it frightened me to see myself starting to think that that was alright. For couples who began going out in high school and then went to separate colleges – growing distant with each other and naturally breaking up was a common enough story.

However, I still wanted to know where things stood. The last time I saw her was during Christmas Eve in a public park near Ikebukuro station. She had become thinner and looked even more worn out than before. Perhaps in order to be able to take a photo at a moment's notice, she had an obtrusive SLR camera hanging on her neck.

"We've been friends since our first year of high school, but if things keep going the way they are, our relationship is going to end."

After much consideration, I finally let her know what I honestly felt. I didn't know what else to do.

"If you can't go out with me, then tell it to me straight."

It was cold out and snow threatened to fall at any moment. The sun had set and there was no one else in the park besides us. Our breath hung in the air, turned white by the cold.

"You're right."

After a long pause, she finally muttered her response. It was the same beautiful voice she had used when we first met.

"It would be better if we went back to being friends like before."

Those were the words that ended our relationship.

She said to go back to being friends, but we ended up not contacting each other at all after that. It wasn't until much later that we realized it. Neither of us had said "I love you" even once in all the time we had been going out.

"… back then I still wasn't used to living alone, and working those part time jobs really was exhausting, you know," Akiho said casually as she sipped on her lemon sour. She had already drunk half her glass.

"Of course, it wasn't like I could afford to slack off on schoolwork either…it got so bad that I didn't even really have any time for other people anymore."

"Ah, I think I get it. Things changed too much and you were overwhelmed, something like that," Sawamoto loudly interjected.

"Even so, I always thought I could've treated Daisuke better. If it turned out that I could never look him in the eye again because of what happened…"

"But we're here right now aren't we?"

I shook my index finger in front of me as I brought a second beer to my mouth. Good grief, we had been reunited for all of ten

minutes. I wasn't expecting us to start talking about such a serious subject.

"Ah, I see…sorry about that."

"No need to apologize."

It's not like I was angry about what happened back then. Even I understood that there was no helping it.

Our eye met for a moment and Akiho broke into a wide smile. I wondered if she had always been like this. She had been calm and collected in the past, but now she seemed bolder.

"So Kousaka, you already found a job, right? Where do you work?"

Sawamoto changed the topic at just the right moment. He asked the question bluntly, reading the mood unexpectedly well.

"At a photography studio in Sangenjaya. One of my upperclassmen put in a good word for me and now I work as an assistant," Akiho answered.

"And well, the pay really sucks, but now I can seriously take photos. I'll give guys the URL later, I also uploaded them on the internet …"

She excitedly began talking about her work. She said that she had recently been visiting old apartment buildings constructed in the Showa era to take portraits of the residents alongside the architecture. It seemed she was expending a lot of effort in order to become a pro photographer.

Compared to the past, she spoke a lot more now and was better at interacting with people. I could see her getting tossed around in an unforgiving workplace environment. As I listened to her story, I found myself straining my ears for any details about her love life. It surprised me that I was even paying attention to that. Who she was going out with now had nothing to do with me.

“So is Daisuke’s girlfriend really an older lady from an antiquarian bookshop in Kita-Kamakura?”

Having noticed my silence, Akiho changed the subject.

“About that … it seems that they aren’t actually dating yet.”

The one who spoke up was none other than Sawamoto.

“Huh? I thought it had to be true since you were the one who told me.”

“He just works part time at her store, nothing more than that. It’s kind of in a delicate spot right now.”

“Ah, so that’s how it is. Well, we should go to the store and try to set those two up.”

The two of them made fun of me while grinning broadly.

“You guys are getting ahead of yourselves,” I interjected.

“I have a lot deal with, you know.”

“Then isn’t it fine to discuss it? You can ask us anything you want.”

“Right, right. We’ll give you advice any time.”

Sawamoto and co. got even more fired up. It looked like they planned to make fun of me until the very end. With the alcohol starting to take effect, the mood had become very lighthearted. It somehow reminded me of the conversations we used to have back in high school.

While I was looking at the side of the seemingly calm Akiho’s face, the conversation turned to her.

“Is it alright for you to be here drinking with us right now? There was a funeral right?”

“Today’s the memorial service and, well… it looked like everything would be alright even if I wasn’t there, so I just left in the middle of the ceremonial dinner.”

Normally it wouldn't be alright if someone "just left in the middle of the ceremonial dinner." Perhaps, just as in the past, she didn't get along with her relatives.

"Even so, we haven't heard from you yet. Who passed away?" Sawamoto asked. He had already polished off his third beer.

"It was my father," Akiho answered without hesitating.

The playful mood from just moments before dissipated. This was the first I had heard of her father being here in Kamakura. Sawamoto and I carefully set down both of our mugs and began solemnly conveying our condolences. Akiho embarrassedly shook her head and waved her hands in front of her.

"Ah, it's fine, it's fine. Sorry about that, I'm making you guys worry. I had known his health was declining for a while now, and hardly spent any time with him anyway." She began to tell us about the heavy matter of her family's circumstances.

It brought to mind that night long ago when I had escorted Akiho back home after she had broken curfew. At that time there was only a grandfatherly old man standing at the gate. I suppose her father had just stayed inside that night. He had no intention of waiting outside until his daughter finally came home after missing curfew.

"I actually came to talk to Daisuke about something today."

Akiho looked directly at me, suddenly becoming more serious.

"Huh?" My heartbeat started speeding up. I wondered what she was going to say.

"I tried to get in touch with you directly, but your phone number and email address were different from before."

"Ah."

I switched carriers and got a new phone before I started my job search. I didn't know Akiho's phone number or email address

either. I had tried to make things final after the breakup and so I erased her number.

“What did you want to talk about?”

I couldn’t help putting up my guard. For a girl that broke up with me four years ago to contact me – it couldn’t be anything ordinary. Unless it was a religious solicitation or to ask me to join an MLM scheme.

There was also one last remote possibility. What was I going to do if she said something like, “Let’s start over and try one more time?” Of course, I already had Shinokawa — Wait, already had Shinokawa?

It’s not like we were dating. Like Sawamoto said earlier, ‘it was a delicate situation.’

“It’s about your job,” Akiho continued.

“Huh? Work?”

“Right, it’s with that book shop you work at. I have some old books I want to sell.”

All the strength left my shoulders. I was really overthinking this. I let myself get carried away and felt ashamed. I had always been overly self-conscious.

“The books my father left behind, I’d like to sell them. To the Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia.”

Shinokawa and I passed an elementary school in Onarimachi. Its front gates towered upwards like something right out of a period drama. They were said to be the last vestiges of an imperial villa located here long ago.

Akiho’s house was near the elementary school. It was an attractive Japanese style house with a dark gray roof. Nothing at all had changed since the time I had escorted Akiho home all those

years ago. I parked the car in a corner of the premises and turned to face the main entrance through the gate. Shinokawa was using a cane, and her gait was a little unsteady when we stepped out of the car. Walking on the stepping stones was probably going to be difficult for her.

“All you alright?”

“Y-yes.”

I slowly walked next to her. My plan was to support her just in case it looked like she was about to fall. It had been a long time since I last set eyes on this garden with the deer-chasers and stone lanterns. Just like I thought the first time I came here, Akiho must have come from an extraordinarily wealthy family. If you carefully looked into the lake you could even see bright red carp swimming in the water.

“Why did it have to be our shop specifically?”

Shinokawa murmured while looking down at her feet.

“Huh?”

“There are plenty of other antiquarian bookshops near here. Why were we specifically chosen to buy their books?”

“Apparently it was in the will of the late owner of these books. Did he sell books to us in the past?”

Akiho’s father managed a restaurant chain in the prefecture, but it seems he fell ill and had been recuperating in his home for the past few years. I was told that he had a very fastidious personality and had laid out detailed instructions on how his personal library would be handled in his will.

An assessment of the estate would be carried out as soon as the funeral proceedings ended and everything settled down. A price would be put on anything with a clear value during this evaluation. Anything that didn’t have a clear value would be left behind, and so on and so forth. I supposed they found that

properly dealing with the library was a pain.

I hadn't heard much about the book collection in question. Akiho said that there were quite a few historical novels, but it looked like even she didn't know much about it besides that. She said that she didn't have any relatives who were into books either.

"I don't believe I've met him before, but it's possible that he was a customer back when my father ran the shop."

The two of us stopped in front of the entrance.

There was no sign of anyone inside the building – no, there was actually the faint sound of a piano coming from inside.

Is that Akiho playing?

I hadn't heard of her taking piano lessons, but it wouldn't have been so surprising if she had another side to her after such a long time. It was a beautiful song with a calm tempo.

Shinokawa stood in front of the sliding door and pressed the old fashioned buzzer. The piano suddenly stopped and I hear the sound of footsteps coming towards the door.

I glimpsed someone's figure coming towards us from behind the clouded glass. The sliding door opened and the person who stood there….

…was not Akiho.

"What?"

A middle aged woman with streaks of grey in her hair, wearing a plain brown kimono with a grey sash, stood there looking coolly at us. She had sharp facial features and scowling eyes.

"And who might you be?"

She asked the question imposingly. It was hard to believe that she had been the one playing such beautiful music. You would have never been able to tell by looking at her.

Shinokawa stepped forward and deeply lowered her head. When she returned to an upright position, her entire face was flushed red.

“Thank you for your continued patronage. We’re from Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia, we came to purchase books.”

I would hesitate before saying that she was being crisp and proper, but I guess it was a formal enough greeting.

“Ah, so you’re the ones Akiho called.”

It was only for a moment, but she spat out Akiho’s name like it was unpleasant. I didn’t know what kind of relationship she had with Akiho, but it looked like they weren’t on good terms.

“This way please.”

She turned back into the house and urged us inside. Leaning on her cane, Shinokawa slowly took off her shoes and put them together facing the same direction in the entranceway.

“It must be tough having a bad leg.”

She spoke bluntly which made it sound like she was urging Shinokawa to hurry up.

Shinokawa and I were now in the house and the woman in the kimono began to lead us down the hallway.

“The books are in the library further in.” She spoke without turning back to face us.

“Uh…Umm I would like to light incense for the recently deceased….would that be a problem?”

The woman in the kimono suddenly turned her head and glanced at us from over her shoulder. Her face was completely unreadable, making it hard to tell what she was thinking.

“That’s very thoughtful of you. This way please.”

She opened the sliding door next to her and entered. It was a

sunlit Japanese style room. A large window faced the garden. We could see the koi pond and skipping stones from where we stood.

The tokonoma inside the room contained a startlingly large altar. It was a shrine set up to contain the ashes during the seven week mourning period.

Due to the sheer number of flowers on the altar, both the portrait and the ashes were obscured. A similar shrine was set up at my house when my grandmother died, but it was nothing this extravagant. The difference in wealth was apparent even in situations like this. The two of us sat in front of the altar to burn the incense. Since she was the shop owner, Shinokawa went first. When it was my turn, I lowered my head in front of the platform and looked up at the memorial photograph. This would be the first time I ever saw Akiho's father's face.

"Eh?"

I unconsciously let out a voice. The person in the photo was a white haired man wearing traditional Japanese clothing. His sharp cheekbones resembled the woman in the kimono, but his sunken eyes looked like Akiho's. The face was a lot gentler than I remembered it to be, but this was the same old man who had been standing in the yard when I escorted Akiho back home that night.

"Goura"

Shinokawa softly cautioned me. I came back to my senses. I hurriedly finished offering the incense, stood up, and stepped away from the shrine. So the man I had met back then was Akiho's father. He might have been 60, no, perhaps even 70 years old when I met him.

"Was there something about my father…?"

The voice of the woman in the kimono standing off to the side pricked my ears. I spoke without thinking.

“Ah, excuse me.”

We left the Japanese style room and headed back to the library. Shinokawa’s cane sounded throughout the hallway with each step. I followed behind the two of them, my thoughts turned to Akiho’s family situation.

The woman in the kimono called the old man “father” just now. She wasn’t old enough to be Akiho’s mother, which meant that she was most likely her older sister. Of course, they had different mothers, which made them half siblings.

I could kind of understand why Akiho didn’t get along with her relatives, and why she left in the middle of the ceremonial dinner. She said her parents were no longer together, but had never mentioned whether they were divorced or had been in previous marriages. What if…

“Which reminds me, there is one thing I’d like you to be aware of.”

The woman in the kimono stopped in front of the door at the end of the hallway and turned around. The library was most likely behind this door.

“I heard my father talking to an acquaintance on the phone when he was alive. Apparently there’s a book worth some hundreds of thousands of yen somewhere in this collection. We don’t know which one it is, but if you find it, please appraise it accurately.”

She glared at us. It was clear that she would not forgive us if this book was sold for less than it was worth.

What an unpleasant way of asking. Especially coming from someone who eavesdropped on her father’s phone conversations without permission.

“Of course, we will keep an eye out for it.”

Shinokawa said this in a softer voice than she normally did. As

usual, she fumbled over her words a bit, but today she also seemed strangely on top of things.

“I appreciate it.”

Satisfied, Akiho’s older sister opened the door. Inside was a wide western style room with wooden floors. The interior was dim, with very little natural light coming in. In order to protect their books from being damaged by the sunlight, many people setup their libraries in north facing rooms.

Three of the walls had bookshelves built right into them. There were also cardboard boxes piled on the floor. Akiho was in the middle of taking some books out of one of them when we walked in. Her hair was tied up to make it more manageable and she wore a plain sweater with jeans. This suited her more than the one piece dress she had been wearing the other day.

“Ah, Daisuke, you’re already here.” She stood up swiftly and turned to face Shinokawa. Why did it feel like I should be running away?

Shinokawa was the first to open her mouth.

“Thank you very much for making this order. My name is—”

“Shinokawa Shioriko, right?” Akiho said, as if to confirm.

“Y-yes…”

“I’m Kousaka Akiho. I used to be Daisuke’s classmate.” Akiho gazed fixedly at her conversation partner. Shinokawa remained quiet, keeping her eyes locked on the ground. She was starting to become increasingly distressed. Akiho smiled at me meaningfully.

“She sure is cute. Good for you Daisuke.”

Why was she putting me on the spot like this? How was I supposed to react to that?

“The room’s covered in dust. Akiho, at least open the window.” The woman in the kimono made an unpleasant face and spoke up.

There was already a large stack of old books piled up on the floor. The dust must have come from the cardboard boxes and had accumulated from being left in storage for so long.

“It’s just the window, why don’t you open it yourself?” Akiho smiled and responded to her older sister without looking at her.

“You’re always complaining and never want to actually do anything.”

It felt like the temperature in the room suddenly dropped. I thought back to the piano performance earlier. Akiho’s older sister was leisurely playing the piano while Akiho herself was here getting covered in dust.

“How absurd. You were the one father asked to take care of the books. You were also the one that told father about the shop, were you not?” The woman in the traditional clothes did not seem angry and replied in an uninterested manner.

“You eavesdrop on people’s conversations so easily. What an unpleasant habit.” Akiho’s smile disappeared. She did not lose to her sister at all in terms of ferocity.

“I just have good ears is all. You and father both have loud voices and always argued whenever you saw each other.”

The older woman evidently remembered that there were still outsiders in the room. She looked at us briefly and spoke with a sour look on her face.

“Sorry we showed you something so unsightly, please pay it no mind.”

That was kind of impossible.

“Anyway, I’m leaving this to you. Let me know what price the books will sell for as soon as you know. And make sure you don’t get tricked.”

“I understand, Mitsuyo.”

Akiho's older sister, Mitsuyo, sneered and turned around towards the door. Likewise, Akiho bared her teeth in derision. Their facial expressions somehow resembled each other.

The gut-wrenching exchange ended, and the three of us were left alone in the library. Akiho turned towards Shinokawa and lowered her head.

"You shouldn't have had to see that. I'm sorry."

"No, no, it's quite alright." Even after saying that, Shinokawa was still unable to hide her astonishment. We only came here to purchase books. She wasn't expecting to see a heated argument between family members.

"Is it always like that between you and your sister?"

"It's been like this since forever. Hey, you know, I was an illegitimate child."

We lapsed into silence. The sound of a piano could be heard again, playing from somewhere within the estate. "Mitsuyo" had started playing again.

"You never told me that before."

"Huh? Really?"

This confidence of hers was new. The Akiho of the past would have never been able to speak so boldly. She would not have told me this even when I was going out with her.

"But she's still one of my better relatives. She doesn't talk behind people's backs and is always up front. Even when talking about money, for example."

I was taken aback. Given that Akiho's father died, there should have been issues of inheritance. If she didn't get along with her relatives, there's no way there wouldn't be conflict. Akiho's older sister must have insisted that everything get appraised accurately because this library was part of that inheritance.

“So, could I ask you to accurately appraise the books as well?” Akiho asked Shinokawa.

“O-of course.”

“Is there anything you need? If so, I can bring it for you.”

“N-no, there’s nothing in particular.”

Shinokawa, who had been looking into her shoulder bag, stopped. It looked like she was having trouble finding something. After rustling through the bag, she spoke with a resigned expression on her face.

“I’m very sorry….umm…If you don’t mind, I umm….forgot to bring a memo pad.”

Was it something to get that upset about?

Akiho smiled and nodded.

“Got it. I’ll see if I can find one for you.”

She lightly walked out towards the hallway. As she exited, she shot me a fleeting glance.

“Good luck with the job, Daisuke.”

With a sound, Akiho shut the door. Her voice, which had just called my name, hung in the air.

“Daisuke.”

“Eh? What is it?”

“…is what she called you, right?” Shinokawa spoke earnestly.

For a moment, I thought Shinokawa was calling me by my given name.

“Ah, she’s….”

Akiho was the only one who used to call me by that name while we were in school. Moreover, it was something she started doing after we started dating.

“Oh, I see. Was that because you were in the same class in high school?” Shinokawa asked, pressing for information. She looked at me with inquiring eyes from behind her glasses.

I considered telling her. It was probably obvious if you looked at us anyway. I didn’t want to talk about it, but it wasn’t really a secret either.

“Truth is, we were in a relationship in the past. Until the first year of college.”

As soon as I said that, her wide eyes grew even wider. Her usual fair complexion turned a deep red.

“Ehh? That’s what it was?” Her voice cracked. No matter how you looked at it, she was seriously surprised. She really didn’t notice at all. While she was certainly astute when she came to books, it seemed she was ignorant about things like this.

“I-I’m sorry…I didn’t mean to pry….”

“It’s alright, I chose to talk about it.”

I felt a little bad about being so frank, but still – why did she ask that question just now?

“Was there anything you were curious about?”

“No, it’s just that I went to an all girl’s school…and I was wondering if people who went to mixed schools called each other by their given names even if they were of the opposite sex. But that couldn’t be right.”

Shinokawa looked down in embarrassment.

“Being able to call a man by their given name somehow sounds nice. I haven’t had much opportunity to do that so far…”

What was on my mind was that she said that she hadn’t had “much” opportunity. This might have meant that she didn’t have “absolutely no” experience.

“Shinokawa, are you dating anyone?”

Somehow, I felt like this was the right atmosphere to ask that question. If possible, I would have liked to ask her more casually.

“You mean…me?” Shinokawa pointed at herself with her index finger.

It was a gesture that said that she did not quite understand the question. I nodded yes, and her long black hair shook like a whirlwind as she furiously shook her head from side to side.

“Heavens no! …Me!?…Such an absurd….”

She didn’t need to go so far as to call it absurd, but now there was no doubt that she wasn’t seeing anyone. I was a little relieved. What type of person did she like? Was there anyone she was interested in? I felt like trying to ask those questions but…

“Achoo!”

Shinokawa’s strange sneeze made me miss my timing. Come to think of it, Akiho hadn’t opened the window earlier. There was a large quantity of white dust floating around.

“Should I ventilate the room?”

“Ah, no, it’s alright.” She lightly waved her hand.

“So, shall we begin?”

I took all of the books out of the cardboard box as instructed and put them in a pile on the floor. After that, I organized the books, facing the spines in the same direction in order to make them easier to evaluate.

I took a quick glance around at all the books stored in the library. What caught my eye was the sheer number of books by authors like Fujisawa Yuuhei, Shiba Ryoutarou, and Ikenami Shoutarou. All of them were historical and period novels, and the like. In addition, there were business related books on economics and workplace management. Outside of that, there were barely any

other types of books.

Shinokawa was standing in front of a bookshelf scanning the book spines from top to bottom. She was pulling books off the shelf one by one and adding them to the several ever-growing piles on the floor. She favored one leg as she worked, but seemed to be getting the hang of it.

“How are you sorting these books?” I asked Shinokawa.

She answered without pausing her work.

“There are books that need to be appraised individually, books that can be appraised in a bunch, and books that cannot be appraised at all. Whenever I have a lot of books to appraise, I start by separating them into these groups. I’m sure there are other ways of doing this but…oh?”

Shinokawa unexpectedly picked up a book and turned to face me. The book had the title “Swine and Roses” printed on a yellow cover. The author was Shiba Ryoutarou.

“This one’s rare.”

I knew who Shiba Ryoutarou was. His drama, *Clouds above the Hill*, always played on TV. This was the first I had heard of *Swine and Roses* though.

“What kind of book is it?”

“It’s a mystery novel.”

“Mystery? Not a historical book?”

“He wrote it at his publisher’s request during a time when societal mysteries were in high demand. The female protagonist’s boyfriend dies a suspicious death, so she teams up with a reporter acquaintance to unravel the mystery and…here, take a look at this.”

Shinokawa took the book out of the box and turned to a page towards the back. I timidly looked at the part she was indicating. It

looked like the author's afterword:

> ...any particular reason for writing this. Mystery novels are becoming popular so I was asked to write one as well. I have neither the interest, nor the talent, nor the knowledge to write mystery novels. I was told to write one, and after a long struggle, I managed to finish this. Of course, this is the only one of my works that could be called a mystery, and I certainly don't intend on writing another one.

"It's pretty amazing, isn't it?"

He mentioned that he was asked to write the book by the publishing company twice in that one short article. I guess he was extremely reluctant to write this novel.

"It gets even better!" Shinokawa whispered as if she were sharing a secret.

> I truly dislike the detectives that show up in mystery novels. Why do they have to go so far to uncover other people's secrets? I cannot understand the source of that passion. Their perverse ways of solving mysteries are so strange that they themselves become the theme of the novel, or get to the point where you might even consider them psychological case studies.

My eyes went wide. I had never, ever heard of an author completely rejecting an entire genre in the afterword. What would the people who bought this book have thought?

"Is this book interesting?"

"Let's see...the book has a fairly dark tone, but that doesn't mean it's necessarily bad. I thought the character portrayals were fitting ..."

She quietly closed *Swine and Roses*.

“This book was even taken out of Shiba Ryoutarou’s complete works. Several other books were also taken out of the complete collection. They have all since become collectors’ items.”

“So could this be the book that was said to be worth hundreds of thousands of yen?”

“No…the book’s condition isn’t that good and the wrapper is missing, so at best …”

A piece of paper unexpectedly fell out of the book. I caught it reflexively and turned it over. It was a statement of delivery with what looked to be the name of a secondhand bookstore and address stamped on it. The address was in Tokyo and the book cost 40,000 yen. It was fairly expensive, but still wasn’t worth hundreds of thousands of yen.

“There’s no doubt that he ordered this through the mail.”

Shinokawa took *Swine and Roses* and added it to one of the piles of books. That was most likely the pile of books that “needed to be appraised individually.”

“Are there a lot of high priced books in this room?” I asked Shinokawa.

“Let’s see … as for whether there are a lot of them … that would depend on who purchases them as well as the condition of the books themselves. There do seem to be quite a few rare books here though.”

She pointed to one of the stacks of books. There were books on business etiquette, old English instruction books, and economic magazine back issues piled up.

“I can’t put a price on any of the books here, but there aren’t many people that collect books like these. That being said, it’s also unlikely that he was rereading these books … perhaps he was hesitant to throw away the books he owned. Maybe he was the

type of person who valued his possessions …”

“You can understand a person’s personality just from the books they own?”

“I think they reflect a person’s character. Hobbies aside, there are people who can tell a person’s occupation and even their age just by looking at their book collection.”

Since it looked like she was talking about other people, I suppose Shinokawa herself couldn’t do it. So that meant there were people who had that much insight into books out there.

“Here, look at this please.” She pointed to one of the bookshelves that she hadn’t touched yet.

There were old volumes lined up on the shelves. There was Ariyoshi Sawakos’s *The Doctor’s Wife* and *Homura* as well as Inoue Yasushi’s *Tonkou*, *Roof Tile of Tempyo*, and *Ruten*.

“Both Ariyoshi Sawako and Inoue Yasushi have written many novels set in modern times, but not a single one of those is present here. The previous owner appears not to have had any interest in books that weren’t period dramas or otherwise related to history.”

“But what about *Swine and Roses* just now?”

“T-that was the exception. There was definitely something specific he was fixated on, which led him to purchase that.”

She pulled Ruten off the furthest end of the shelf as she spoke. It looked like the paper quality was bad to begin with, but now it was even worse. The pages must have gotten wet at some point and there was now a wavy pattern running all over it.

There was a price stuck in between the back cover and the endpaper. It cost 50,000 yen. It was received from the same store listed in the delivery statement for *Swine and Roses*.

“This book is also rare, but I can’t price it highly either. It would have been worth more if it were in better condition though.”

I looked down at the copy of *Swine and Roses* which she had casually set down earlier. That wasn't really in good condition either, meaning it probably wasn't worth much.

"He wasn't picky about things like a book's condition, was he?"

"Or perhaps he had a set maximum price he was willing to pay for a book …. At any rate, it appears that there aren't any books that go above a specific amount.

If that were the case, then it would mean that the book worth hundreds of thousands of yen did not exist. Since it was just something Akiho's older sister overheard, it might not have even been here in the first place.

"I knew it, something's off," Shinokawa muttered to herself as she closed the 50,000 yen *Ruten*.

"What is it?"

"This person frequently bought books from an antiquarian bookshop in Tokyo. Why didn't he ask them to purchase the books from his collection? If he wanted his books properly taken care of, it would have made sense to place his trust in a store he already had a relationship with. I still can't understand why he would go out of his way to choose our store."

"Wasn't it because Akiho told her father about our shop?"

That was also something I was uneasy about. Why did Akiho tell her father about Biblia? It's not like she had visited our store before.

"It would be unnatural for someone who owned rare books to sell their cherished collection to a store that they had no relation to."

I thought back to that old man's expression. He certainly didn't look like someone who would decide something so important just based on what his daughter said.

“There’s something more to this purchase request.”

As she said that, the door opened.

“I’m sorry, I kept you waiting.” Akiho came into view.

“I searched, but couldn’t find an actual memo pad … would these work instead?”

As she said that, she held out a stack of insert flyers that had been pulled from a newspaper. My grandfather used write on flyers like these too, but it was surprising to see that people living in such a large house were frugal about such insignificant things.

Maybe he was the type of person who valued his possessions.

Shinokawa’s words came back to me. What if—

“Did you bring these out from your father’s room?”

“Eh? Yes, I guess this was a habit of his. He was someone who hated treating his things carelessly. How did you know?”

“Well…just a guess.”

She really was able to discern his personality from the books that he owned.

“Thank you very much. You’ve been a great help.”

Shinokawa timidly accepted the makeshift memo pad.

“Um…if it’s alright, shall I take care of your coats? This room is really dusty so …. I can take yours too, Daisuke.”

Speaking of which, Shinokawa still had her coat on. I had just tossed mine on the floor a while ago. It didn’t cost much, so it was alright of a little dust got on it. I’d just wipe it off later anyway.

“I’m fine but …”

“I’m also alright and umm … I appreciate you asking.” Shinokawa’s words were smoother than they were before.

“Your father was the one who chose our store, right?”

“That’s right,” Akiho responded, without any trace of distrust.

“He wrote down instructions on how to manage the books and entrusted those instructions me. To be honest, it was rather surprising. Last month, when we were talking about Biblia Books, he mentioned that he had never actually gone inside the store.”

“How did you end up talking about our store in the first place?” I interjected.

Akiho scratched the outer corner of her eye with a troubled expression. “Ah…well…”

She kept shooting fleeting glances at me. Just what could it be?

Akiho turned to face Shinokawa and replied,

“About a month ago, I returned to this house after being away for a long time. I didn’t plan on staying long and only dropped by since I happened to be in the area. My father and I were chatting in the living room when he suddenly asked me ‘How’s that big guy who brought you back home a long time ago doing?’”

The accent Akiho used to impersonate her father’s speech was unmistakable.

“Eh? Your father was originally from the Kansai area?” Shinokawa’s eyes went wide.

Did that matter somehow?

Akiho gave a confused nod. “Yeah. He was born in Osaka, but moved here when he was young.”

“Why did a conversation about me come up?”

That’s what I didn’t understand. He only saw my face once four years ago, how the hell did he still remember me?

“I don’t really know either. Maybe he was curious about whether or not his daughter had someone she could marry. He made a sullen face when I told him that we had broken up a long time ago.”

With a composed expression, Akiho smoothly revealed our past relationship. Shinokawa already knew about it, so it was probably alright—in fact, doing it this way was better than clumsily trying to hide it.

“So I told him what I knew, that you were going out with the owner of an antiquarian bookshop in Kita-Kamakura. And that you took over the shop and were running it alone since she was hospitalized…”

“Wait a second. How did the story get twisted into *that*?”

I hurriedly interrupted her. Shinokawa looked dumbfounded. I wasn’t dating her, I was only looking after the shop. In the first place, she had already been discharged from the hospital last month.

“That’s what I heard from Sawamoto, you see. But it looks like he was going off of rumors.”

“That idiot.” I clicked my tongue.

He should have called me before spreading rumors like that.

“I’m really, truly sorry.” The apology was aimed at Shinokawa.

“N-no, same here….I’m sorry.”

Akiho lowered her head towards me as well, but there wasn’t really any need for her to apologize.

“So, about your father…”

We were turning back to the previous topic. It seemed Shinokawa was still curious about a few things.

“Did he say anything about our shop?”

After a brief silence, Akiho shook her head from side to side.

“After I told him what I knew, he said something about how it must be tough managing a store alone. But then he used that to start lecturing me and it ended up turning into an argument.”

“An argument?”

“It happened all the time. Father apparently didn’t want me to run into hardships at work. ‘Find a good husband and build a family’ was one of the things he frequently said.”

In this day and age, such an old fashioned—no, in the first place, such ways of thinking were normal for people from his era.

“I thought he was being blind to his own faults. In the end, I told him that I absolutely would not quit my job and would continue to do what I wanted. It wasn’t the first time we had an argument like that.”

Akiho smiled bitterly. The reason she started living alone so suddenly was probably because of falling outs like this. I suppose she and her father were close to breaking off all ties with each other by the time they had this argument.

“My father also went through hardships because of work when he was younger, so I understand what he wanted to say. But as far as his life experiences go, well, it’s a long story.”

“Did your father always work in the food service industry?” Shinokawa asked.

Come to think of it, I did hear that he managed a restaurant chain.

“No, he apparently worked various jobs before he moved here. He made rubber boots at a factory, worked as a receptionist at an art gallery while he studied for his certifications, and played piano accompaniment for chanson singers at cabaret clubs, for example.”

He was an unexpectedly multi-talented person. I glanced at the side of Shinokawa’s face. There had to be a reason behind these questions. I was uneasy about the brooding expression she had on.

“Thank you very much and … I’m very sorry for asking you such

prying questions.”

“I don’t mind at all. There aren’t many people who come to ask me about memories of my father.”

It was only for a moment, but Akiho’s voice sounded low-spirited. In order to shake that off, she put her hand on her hip and surveyed the library around her.

“Is it alright if I don’t help? There isn’t much else I could do.”

“It’s quite alright. Thank you for bringing the memo pad.”

I wordlessly looked back at Akiho as she left the room with a smile. If I had asked her more about her parents in the past, would she have opened up to me? If we had still been going out, would she have told me about her father?

Suddenly, there was a sigh. However, it wasn’t from me.

“What’s wrong?”

Shinokawa was deep in thought with an unusually serious expression.

“…it feels like I’m overlooking something very important here.” She placed a finger on her chin.

“I’m close to figuring it out … but there’s still something missing.”

Although Shinokawa was close to figuring out “something important”, she quickly finished up her work first. The books filling the room were sorted in one go, and the items that could be evaluated had tags with written prices affixed to them. The books that couldn’t be appraised were all stored in an empty cardboard box. I don’t think even an hour passed between when she started writing in the memo pad and when she finished calculating the total. It was an impressive speed, but the worker herself seemed disappointed.

“I had a harder time than I thought I would.”

Since the home purchasing program involved going to many different houses, being able to work quickly and accurately at the same time was essential.

Shinokawa called for Akiho and presented her with the memo pad that had the purchasing price written on it. I thought it was a fair price since the library did contain some rare books, even if they weren't all in good condition.

However, if the book that was worth hundreds of thousands of yen had been included in this, it would have been would have been an unfair asking price. Shinokawa briefly explained how much each book was going for. She wasn't particularly skilled, but she was getting used to giving easy to understand explanations. Akiho nodded and listened until the end.

"What should I do with these unappraised books?"

Akiho said, with a complicated look on her face as she accepted the payment. There was still a large cardboard box filled to the brim with left over books. At the top of the box rested a magazine titled "Japan's economic boom will continue into the 21st century," followed by several other business related texts. They would serve absolutely no use in this day and age.

"Did your father leave any instructions about these?"

"Let's see…if I remember correctly, he said: 'Take all of the books that the Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia does not purchase and dispose of them.' Come to think of it…all I have to do is get rid of them, right? Recyclable trash can't be taken out until tomorrow… but whatever, I have a car."

"Can't you stay the night and take everything out tomorrow?"

"Barring any unforeseen circumstances, I'm not planning on staying the night here. There's someone else I don't want to see even more than Mitsuyo, so I'm going back to work tomorrow."

"Why can't you ask your sister to take it out tomorrow?"

“I kinda can’t do that either.” Akiho shook her head.

“The rule in this house is that once father asks you to do something, it’s your responsibility until the very end.”

“I see…”

Ultimately, I thought the reason she didn’t ask her sister wasn’t because of any rule, but rather because Akiho herself didn’t want to. This was the final task her father had entrusted to her, after all.

“Why don’t you bring them to a larger bookshop and have them take a look at the books?”” Shinokawa asked.

“Since the way they appraise books is different, you might even get some money for the ones we weren’t able to appraise today. In any case, even if they don’t buy the books, you could still give them away for free.”

The room lapsed into silence. Mitsuyo had stopped her piano performance without any of us even noticing. She must have gotten tired of playing. However, that had nothing to do with what was happening now.

“Alright, I’ll try doing that.”

Shinokawa and I were each tying about a dozen books together. To keep the books in place, we wrapped each stack once around the front using a single vinyl cord. The spines of the books were neatly arranged to face the same direction.

I learned this after I started working here, but when transporting old books, it was more common to tie them together rather than putting them in a cardboard box. If you packed them into a box, then you would have to open every single one in order to ascertain their contents. If you just tied them together, however, you could tell the right title just by looking at the spine.

Only large books were tied using two pieces of cord crossed one

over the other; tankoubon sized books were normally bound with a single cord. There was a trick to binding books with only one cord; if you tie it too loose, the cord will come apart, if you tighten it too much, there will be marks left on both sides of the book where the cord touched.

“This book is expensive, so please insert a piece of paper between the cord and the book in order to protect it,” Shinokawa instructed.

Shinokawa had a thoughtful expression on her face as she continued her work. It was strange seeing her so deep in thought. Normally she unraveled the mysteries surrounding books right then and there. I searched for something that I could use as a paper buffer for the books, and my eyes fell to the bundle of leaflets that were being used as a memo pad. I borrowed a couple and was carefully tying up the books when Akiho returned to the library.

She was wearing a moss green coat and a knitted hat. It looked like she had already delivered the payment to her sister, Mitsuyo, and was finished preparing for her return home.

“Excuse me, I’m leaving first.”

“Ah, alright.”

Shinokawa stood up from the wooden stepstool she was sitting in and lowered her head. I tentatively did the same.

“Thank you sincerely for allowing us to purchase these precious books.”

“No, no, the pleasure is mine. Well, I’ll go ahead and take the unappraised books then.”

She said that in a lively tone and took the large cardboard box in her arms. I suppose she was going to take it to a secondhand bookstore from here.

“Which store are you going to?”

“There should be a store in Tebiro, that one.”

Come to think of it, I did remember seeing a sign for a used bookstore chain near Tebiro crossing.

“Can you carry that box all the way to the car?”

“It’s fine, it’s fine, I’m used to manual labor.”

She easily pick up the box filled with books as she said that

“And Daisuke, the next time you and Sawamoto go drinking, invite me too.”

“Sure…”

It felt like there was something I should say, but whatever that was, it also probably wasn’t what Akiho wanted to hear.

“Take care.”

“Thank you. Shop owner…excuse me.”

“Umm…Kousaka”

Shinokawa called out to stop her. Akiho, who had been outside the door, turned around, box and all.

“Was Shiba Ryoutarou your father’s favorite author?”

“Yeah, he was.” Akiho smiled.

“He used to say that his books were something like a charm for business prosperity. He would always turn to reading whenever he was worried about work. Yeah, pros like us know how that goes.”

With that, Akiho left, her footsteps fading into the distance. I closed the open library door and turned towards the real “pro”.

“How did you know?”

Shinokawa sat back down on the stool, took two volumes off the mountain of old books and showed them to me.

One was *Swine and Roses* and the other was *On the Highways*.

Both of them were written by Shiba Ryoutarou.

“Shiba Ryoutarou only wrote Modern day stories and essay collections…so I guessed that Akiho’s father was particularly fond of him. “

She put the two volumes back and continued tying stacks of books together. She had probably asked Akiho the question about Shiba Ryoutaro because it was somehow related to the mystery of why Akiho’s father had chosen our store to buy his books.

Just as I crouched down to get back to work,

“…Maybe they came from the same hometown,” Shinokawa unexpectedly muttered.

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“Kousaka’s father and Shiba Ryoutarou. If that were the case, then it wouldn’t be so strange for him to hold a particular interest in that author.”

It seemed that there was more to this conversation after all. I stopped what I was doing.

“Was Shiba Ryoutarou from Kyoto?”

“Yes. He had risen to the position of vice president at the Sankei Shimbun headquarters in Osaka when he made his debut. In 1956, *The Magician of Persia*, a novel he wrote over the course of two nights was chosen for an award, if I remember correctly…”

The conversation paused just as it was getting interesting. She put a finger to her temple, looking as if she was trying to drag out a memory.

“…there’s definitely still something I’m overlooking. I’m sorry, let’s continue this conversation another time.”

“Ah, OK.” We were working anyway. Now wasn’t the time to be talking about books.

Shinokawa and I continued our work. Halfway through, we

decided to split the labor. Shinokawa tied the books up and I carried them to the van.

After several trips back and forth, the piles of books started to slowly disappear from the library.

The first unusual event happened about 20 minutes into the work. I was picking up a bundle of books containing the complete collection of Yamada Fuutarou's Ninja Stories when I noticed a small piece of paper on the floor.

It was probably one of the memo papers that Akiho brought. It must have flipped over when it fell. There was some text written in faint letters on it.

"I'm looking for….Ivy Bridge of Kiso"

I gulped. I had seen this before—it was from an inventory request that was faxed into the store last month. The request basically stated that someone was looking for the complete collection of Kunieda Shirou's *Ivy Bridge of Kiso*.

"Look at this, please."

I picked up the scrap of fax paper and handed it to Shinokawa. She also understood what it meant in an instant.

"Did the man who was looking for this book have a Kansai accent?"

I nodded, there was no mistake. The one who had sent the fax back then was Akiho's father.

He had learned about the Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia from Akiho, and must have looked us up in the phone book in order to contact us. After that, he reused the copy of the fax as scratch paper.

"Even so, it's strange. Why did he still request that we buy his books"?

At that time, I couldn't even read the title of the book he was

looking for. He laughed and called me an amateur. Why would he entrust his precious library with a shop that employed amateurs like me?

“I’m also curious about that but…”

Shinokawa indicated the bundle of books she was holding up.

“He seems to have had a good amount of romantic novels as well.”

The bundle contained several books written by Kunieda Shirou. Seeing as how the books were covered in a thin layer of dust, they must have been purchased quite a long time ago.

There was also the *The Demon of Yatsugatake* and Shinshu Kokechi Jo, which was another title that I couldn’t understand. Right next to them was the complete collection of Kunieda Shirou’s *Ivy Bridge of Kiso*. It was identical to the one that we had at the shop.

“Huh?”

I was getting more and more confused. Did this mean he sent in a request looking for a book that he already owned? Why on earth would he do that?

“Ah!”

Shinokawa suddenly let out a loud, startled cry next to me.

“W-what is it?”

“Do you know Kousaka’s cellphone number? If we don’t get in contact with her right away…!!”

She kicked away her stool and dragged her feet with some difficulty to approach me. It looked like something huge had occurred.

“Akiho’s cell number? Yeah, I should…”

I remembered as I moved to take my phone out of my pocket.

“….that’s right, I never did get her cell number.”

When we met at the bar, she only gave me the phone number for this house. I had deleted her cell number from my phone a long time ago.

“What is the matter?” The elder sister, Mitsuyo entered through the library door which had been left open.

“Excuse me, I heard an extremely loud voice and came running over.”

I didn’t think it was loud enough to warrant running over, maybe she really did have good ears.

“Do you by any chance know Kousaka’s cell phone number?” Shinokawa asked with clear enunciation, completely different from before. Perhaps not understanding, Akiho’s older sister narrowed her eyes

“Well…I do have the phone number for her apartment but…”

“I see…”

Shinokawa decided what to do next in an instant.

“I’m very sorry, we will need to excuse ourselves for some time. We will return afterwards to pick up the remaining books. Goura, we need to go.”

Before I could ask where we were going, she had already gotten her cane and left the library. I nodded at Akiho’s sister and hurriedly followed after Shinokawa.

“We’re going to the bookstore in Tebiro.” Shinokawa said as I followed her down the hallway.

“We need to stop Kousaka before she gets rid of of those books.”

“I should have noticed it so much sooner.”

We were in the van leaving the Kousaka estate. Shinokawa spoke

regretfully.

“That inquiry last month was a test.”

“A test?”

“It was a test to see how informed the employees at Biblia were about antiquarian books. Since you passed that test, he requested that our store purchase the books from his personal library.”

“Huh? But I wasn’t well informed at all.”

“That’s right. What Kousaka’s father was looking for was someone who didn’t have much experience. He planned to have you come alone to purchase the books from the very beginning. I think he wanted the request to be fulfilled immediately after the funeral in order to have it wrapped up before I got out of the hospital.”

Come to think of it, the person who called did ask me if I was the only person in the store at the time.

Akiho had passed on Sawamoto’s irresponsible gossip to her father without knowing that Shinokawa had already been discharged from the hospital. That question was probably to check if it was really true that I was the only person managing the Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia at the time.

“But why would he do something like that…?”

“Try to remember what the instructions that were given to Akiho said. The assessment would be carried out on site, and we were to take the books after they were appraised. The books that couldn’t be appraised would be left behind. However, those books would definitely need to be taken out of the estate…if the instructions were strictly followed, what do you think would happen?”

I thought while gripping the steering wheel. The van went up a gentle hill in Hase and was exiting a tunnel covered with autumn colored leaves.

“Akiho would have had to take the books we couldn’t appraise.”

She did say something about taking the large cardboard box filled with books home. Had it not been for Shinokawa’s advice, she really would have done just that.

“There would have been no helping that an amateur would make a mistake. There was a high chance that you would overlook the book without really understanding its true value. Kousaka’s father was working to have that specific book fall into his daughter’s hands.”

In other words, it was something like an elaborate present.

“So does that mean that this is the book that was supposed to be worth hundreds of thousands of yen?”

“Correct…although it’s hard to say if it would be worth quite that much now. Had it been in better condition, it would have easily been worth much more than a hundred thousand yen.”

“Then instead of resorting to this roundabout method, wouldn’t it have been better if he had just passed it on to her normally? In fact, they even met each other in person last month.”

“Perhaps there was the possibility that someone would have overheard their conversation? In the unlikely chance that it got out that Akiho received a rare book from her father, her other relatives would…”

“Ah…”

I thought back to the woman in the kimono—Akiho’s older half-sister who said herself that she “had good ears.” Akiho did not get along with her relatives and would probably become the target of their animosity since this was a problem involving money.

“There might be other reasons as well…but either way, it was something I also overlooked. I put it amongst the books that looked like they couldn’t be priced. I noticed it for a moment, but couldn’t quite remember…. I still have a long way to go.”

She tightly pressed her lips together. It was the first time I had ever seen her make such a frustrated expression. She also had that side to her, I suppose.

The van passed under a monorail overpass. We were almost at our destination, but if Akiho had already sold the books, it would be difficult to get them back. Whether or not we could make it depended on how lucky we were.

“…but Akiho’s father deliberately hid it to make it difficult to find, didn’t he?”

I spoke without taking my eyes off the road. I was thinking of my grandmother, Goura Kinuko, who had hidden a secret she could absolutely not utter to anybody within her copy of Souseki’s Complete Collection.

“It’s not that you were inexperienced. From the very beginning, this was something he wanted to keep hidden—it was never meant to be discovered so easily.”

Silence hung inside the van. I felt a strong gaze at the side of my head and briefly turned to face the passenger seat. Her eyes had gone wide and she was starting to tear up a little. Shinokawa stared at me. It looked like she had somehow been moved by my words. It hadn’t been my intention to say anything strange though.

She was looking at me so much that I couldn’t calm down, it was extremely embarrassing. I loudly cleared my throat.

“So which book was it?”

The bookstore sign came into view in front of us. I slowed down the van.

“The truth is, in that box….”

Just as Shinokawa started to talk, a convenience store in the parallel to the road caught my eye. There was a woman wearing a familiar moss green coat walking out of the store. It looked like she had just bought a drink, and was closing her plastic bottle as she

walked to her car.

Fortunately, there were no cars immediately behind us, and all the cars in the opposite lane were far away. I flashed my turn signal and made a hard turn into the convenience store parking lot. I cut the engine and sprinted out of the car.

Akiho was about to get into what looked like a secondhand red kei car.

“Akiho!”

I yelled as loud as I could.

Her eyes went wide.

“Daisuke…and the store owner. What’s going on?”

“Did you already go to the bookstore?

“Huh? Yeah, I just got back from it. I was thinking about going back to Tokyo from here.”

We got here as fast as we could, but it looked like we were too late. I powerlessly placed my hand on the roof of the car. If we had come even five minutes earlier——

“Hm?”

I looked through the window at the passenger seat. There was a large half-open cardboard box placed in it. Inside the box were stacks of old, tightly packed books.

“What are those books doing there?”

“Oh, those.” Akiho lightly shrugged.

“I carried them over to the store once, but I had a change of heart. Despite everything, these books are my father’s mementos… it’s alright if I keep them in my room for a while.”

I unintentionally breathed a sigh of relief. Perhaps Akiho’s father had even expected that his daughter would do something like this. That she wouldn’t be able to dispose of the books so easily once

she took possession of them.

“Excuse me, but would it be alright if I looked through the contents of the box one more time?”

Having gotten out of the van, Shinokawa spoke up.

“I don’t mind…but what’s going on?” Akiho replied.

Shinokawa lowered the box onto the parking lot black top and sat in the passenger seat of the car. As she checked the contents of the box, I explained the situation to Akiho. I told her that there was a valuable book that was supposed to have been handed down to her somewhere inside that box. We came all the way down here to stop her from selling it to the store.

“…but it’s a little hard to believe that he would go so far just to make sure I got this expensive book.” Akiho had a dubious expression on her face.

“You said he didn’t say anything when you talked to him last month…. If what you’re telling me is really true, wouldn’t he have given you at least a hint at what he was planning?”

I thought that was strange as well. If he had wanted to tell me something, he could’ve found a way. It might have just been his personality.

“Some people don’t like to talk a lot about what they’re thinking, I guess.”

Akiho’s expression clouded. “I also used to be that way.”

“No, I didn’t mean it like that, sorry.”

“It’s not something you need to apologize for.”

“…Um, here it is.”

At Shinokawa’s words, we gathered around the cardboard box. She pointed to a thin book. The book itself looked like it hand been

lovingly read and was considerably old. The orange and black cover had faded, and the corners of book were all damaged.

The title was *Essay of Wise Sayings – Salaryman*. Its subtitle was "Humorous Analects" and the author was Fukuda Sadaichi— it was a name that I had never heard before.

"Is this really it?" I was somewhat let down.

As far as I could see from the cover, it was meant as reading material for salarymen. You wouldn't have thought it was a particularly valuable book.

"Yes, there's no doubt. This is the book that Kousaka's father wanted to pass on to her," Shinokawa said confidently.

Akiho didn't try to reach out for the book, so I took it from Shinokawa instead and quickly looked through it. As the title suggested, it looked to be a collection of wise sayings from all times and places written in an essay style

Some of the wise sayings were from Tokugawa Ieyasu's dying instructions. Others were quotes from works by Goethe, as well as remarks by foreign statesmen. To be frank, there really wasn't any sense of unity.

I turned to the preface at the beginning of the book, and took a look at what was written there:

Although I call this book The Salaryman Analects, I would not be so audacious as to say that these Showa era sayings could be seen as a challenge to Confucius. The difference between Confucius and this lowborn salarymen is like that of the stars in the sky to the worms in the earth.

Considering he was writing a book, it's unlikely he thought so lowly of himself. It did seem like the author was a normal

salaryman though.

“Why is this a rare book?” I still didn’t understand the reason why it would be worth so much.

“Fukuda Sadaichi was Shiba Ryoutarou’s real name. “

“Eh?”

Shinokawa continued to talk in spite of our unintentional exclamations.

“This was published in 1955, a year before he made his debut as a novelist. At that time, he was still working at a newspaper company and certainly was a salaryman. Like *Swine and Roses*, this book also never made it into Shiba Ryoutarou’s complete works anthology.”

I suddenly began to see the thin book in a completely different light.

This person, who called himself a lowborn salaryman, had become a famed writer whose works were read by countless people, even after his death. At that time, not even Shiba Ryoutarou himself would have imagined that he would gain this level of success.

“Perhaps the author did not consider this a work he could be satisfied with. Regardless, it seems this book was read by many people. There were additional printings soon after its release, and it was reprinted two more times under a different title.”

Shinokawa smoothly explained everything she knew about the book. It looked like she was back to her usual self.

“Shiba Ryoutarou didn’t really write about his own life in his works, but this book contains 20 or so stories about his personal experiences written in essay style. In the early postwar period, the demobilized Fukuda Sadaichi flitted between newspaper companies and encountered various hardships. It was something that readers of the time could relate to. Kousaka’s father was one

of those people.

Akiho took the *Essay of Wise Sayings* and examined it closely.

“You can tell Dad lovingly read this book just by looking at it.”

Akiho muttered as if she were remembering something bit by bit.

“When I had just left the house in Kamakura all those years ago, I didn’t talk to my father often. He would sometimes look up from his books, but as always, he never said anything….but why did he give this book to me…?

Shinokawa reached out and turned over the front cover. On the endpaper were letters written with a practiced hand—Fukuda Sadaichi.

“It was an autographed book…?” I murmured.

To think that this book was signed on top of how valuable it already was. We were talking about it being worth 2 or 3 hundred thousand yen, but it was far more valuable than that.

“Not even I can say whether or not this is the real thing with complete certainty. This is the first time I’ve seen an autograph under his real name. Assuming that it is real, and that he signed it after becoming an author, I’m curious about why he didn’t use his pen name. Perhaps he was asked to sign the book before he started using the pen name — or at least before he started using it publicly.

I thought about it for a moment. If that were the case…

“Then does this mean that Akiho’s father knew Shiba Ryoutarou before he made his debut?”

“That’s what I believe. You said that your father once worked as a receptionist at an art gallery, correct?”

Akiho nodded wordlessly in answer to Shinokawa’s question

“Shiba Ryoutarou….the reporter, Fukuda Sadaichi, worked for

the culture department at Sankei Shinbun. It would have only been natural for him to be in and out museums and art galleries to write abound trends in the world of arts. It's possible that they knew each other by sight."

I was struck dumb. It felt like the story had come together in an unbelievable way.

Shinokawa pressed the *Essay of Wise Sayings* into Akiho's hands.

"Your father once said that Shiba Ryoutarou's books were like a protective charm, didn't he?

Shiba Ryoutarou was someone from the same town who went from being a mere salaryman to a great author. To your father who went through hardships because of work, it was perhaps literally a protective charm. He wanted this book to be a charm for you next, I think it was something like that."

"….even though he was always opposed to me working…." Akiho's voice was shaking a little.

"And isn't that the very reason he thought you would need this charm?"

Shinokawa took out a folded piece of paper, and put it in Akiho's hand.

"This fell out in the box. I think it was slipped in between the pages of that book."

It was a small letter. While still holding the book, Akiho slowly opened the note.

To Akiho

-Dad

The letter only had her name; nothing else was written on it.

“…that’s it?”

I whispered the question and Shinokawa nodded. The writing was even fainter than on the fax that he had sent our shop before, and the handwriting was like twisted thread. He must not have had any strength left to write the body of the letter.

Akiho respectfully folded the letter and slipped it back into the book.

“I…never got along with my father.”

Akiho muttered as she looked up at the cloudless autumn sky,

“I was arrogant, cold, and hard to approach. Even when we saw each other…. I never knew what to say. We always said the same things to each other, and it always ended up as an argument. I’m sure Dad didn’t know how to reach me either. We sure do resemble each other. “

Akiho then lightly smiled and turned to Shinokawa.

“Do you know the real reason why hr would go through all these lengths in order to pass this book down to me?”

“I do not.” After thinking for a while, Shinokawa shook her head no.

“What did he want to tell me, was it really alright to pass this book on to me? He never could express his feelings well…just like this letter…”

Suddenly, clear drops began to overflow from Akiho’s eye and stream down her face.

That was the first time I had ever seen her cry.

Shinokawa sat with her back straight in the van's passenger seat. She was making an effort not to look at us, probably out of consideration.

"Not only is she cute, she's also a good person," Akiho said.

She and I were the only ones in the convenience store parking lot. Akiho said that she wanted to talk with me alone for a little bit, so Shinokawa returned to the car without me.

"Even though she originally came to the house to purchase books, she never asked me to sell this one to her, even though it's so rare."

Akiho held the copy of the *Essay of Wise Sayings* that her father had entrusted to her in her hand. I scratched my head.

"She has her own problems too, despite what it looks like."

"You've always liked girls like that though."

"What are you talking about?"

I had a feeling that Akiho was talking about herself.

"Do you remember when the two of us first got close? During the summer of our second year in high school?

"Eh? Yeah."

I was slightly confused, but nodded. I wondered what she wanted to talk about all of a sudden.

"We planned to do our summer homework together and always met up at the library. Sawamoto was busy with club activities and going on dates, so he couldn't come. Which left the two of us…"

"I knew it, you never noticed. That was on purpose."

"Huh?"

"I deliberately planned to meet on days when Sawamoto couldn't come. The fact that we ended up alone with each other wasn't an accident. I think he must have suspected something."

Akiho nonchalantly continued talking. Her tears had already dried on her face.

“I had always liked you since our first year in high school. My heart would pound just from having our shoulders touch when we passed each other or getting to sit near you when our seats were rearranged. I hoped that you would noticed my feelings one day… you never noticed at all though”

“I-I see…” My words came out haltingly.

I certainly never noticed it. Should I thank her for thinking about me that way, or should I apologize for never noticing her feelings? What was I supposed to do here?

“But after that event happened, I stopped waiting. If I didn’t start becoming more proactive, I would have stood no chance at all. You would have ended up with someone else.”

“Event? What happened?

Like many high school boys, I didn’t have much romance to speak of. I don’t think I got along with any girls besides Akiho.

“Daisuke, do you remember when you forgot your textbook at school and had to go back to pick it up on a Sunday? This was before our second summer of high school. Don’t you remember what happened on your way back home?”

“…ah.”

I finally understood what she was talking about. I happened to see Shinokawa in front of Biblia Books. I’m pretty sure I went back home without starting up a conversation with her, but got the feeling that I told Sawamoto and the others about it at school the next day. Akiho was probably asking about that.

“Sawamoto and the others got really riled up and insisted that you talk to her one more time. You didn’t look like you had that kind of courage, but I felt like I was about to faint…it somehow felt like a bad omen. Like I would definitely lose you if you ended up

getting along with her. I gradually became friends with you and worked to closen the gap between us so that there would be rumors…all of that was planned by me.”

“Uhh…”

I was surprised, but at the same time, it made sense. That was the reason why Akiho was so calm when those rumors started to come up.

“My wish came true and we started dating, but there was something I realized. I couldn’t talk to you at all about myself, about my parents, or about my rocky relationship with my parents. I couldn’t open my heart to others about my own problems….just like my father.”

Akiho snorted in self-deprecation. Her laugh resembled her father’s, which I remembered from when he had called the store last month.

“In the end, I strung you along, and we wound up breaking it off….I really thought we’d never see each other again. It was enough to make me want to disappear. I couldn’t forgive myself. That’s why, when I heard from Sawamoto that you were seeing Shinokawa, I was relieved from the bottom of my heart. It felt like the time that had stopped because of my selfishness had begun to move again.”

Just then, my eyes met Shinokawa’s, who happened to look up. Perhaps she was worried about the time. Some of the books we purchased had been left behind at the Kousaka estate, and we couldn’t leave those alone for too long.

“What I want to say is, I hope you find happiness. It would be nice if you could think of our past relationship as just another point in your life….because I’m truly praying that everything goes well with you and the person you love. That’s all I wanted to say, see ya!”

After finally letting everything out, Akiho briskly walked off in the

direction of her car.

Her back looked ready to reject anything I had to say. Since there was nothing else I could do, I also returned to the van.

There was something smoldering in my chest. I had lost the chance to put it into words, but it was a feeling I had had since long ago.

I turned my head right as I opened the driver side door. All feelings will eventually fade away and disappear if they are left alone. If I didn't say this now, I didn't think I'd ever get another chance.

"Akiho!"

Akiho, who was about to get into her own car, raised her head.

"I didn't understand what you were thinking back then.....but even if I didn't understand you, I still wanted to be with you."

I raised my voice to give this a sense of finality.

"But I loved you, I really did."

Akiho stood there dumbfounded. Of course, I had no idea what she was thinking about in that moment. At length, she flashed her white teeth and smiled.

"See ya later, Daisuke." She replied spiritedly.

"Ah, later."

We bade each other farewell and went back to our own cars. Although she said "later", I had a feeling that we wouldn't be seeing each other again.

After I watched Akiho leave the parking lot, I suddenly came back to my senses. Shinokawa's mouth was hanging open. Her entire face was bright red, and she looked like she was about to boil over. Come to think of it, I ended up shouting "I loved you" after opening the door.

“I’m sorry….I overheard that.”

“Ah, no same here. I said some strange things to Akiho even though we’re no longer together…”

It seemed like the more I tried to explain, the deeper I’d be digging myself into a grave. We took the road back to the Kousaka estate with an unbearable atmosphere hanging in the air.

We didn’t talk any more than he had to after that and moving the books back to the van went without a hitch. The only time I stopped working was when Akiho’s older sister called out to me in the hallway.

“I do not know where you went, but please hurry and take everything out.”

“My apologies.”

I lowered my head while carrying three bundles of books. Then, I caught sight of the special money envelope she had in her hand. Kousaka Akiho was listed in the recipient column in neat handwriting.

“I need to take this to the post office by today. Please finish up so I can make it in time.”

“Ah, alright.”

I wondered why she was sending money to Akiho. Moreover, why it needed to be sent today. I couldn’t just ask about it as a complete stranger, but I was still curious.

“Are you wondering about this?”

Perhaps I was too obvious about what I was looking at. She raised her hand and held the envelope out towards me to make it easier to see.

“This is the money from the books that were sold today. I’m sending it over to Akiho. I tried to give it to her earlier, but she stubbornly refused to accept it. Really, she’s always causing me

trouble.”

She quickly clicked her tongue, displaying a snaggletooth. It was the first time in my life I had ever seen someone click their tongue without losing any elegance.

“You were planning on giving the money from the books to her?”

“I wouldn’t bother being stingy about a trivial amount like this… although there are some of our relatives who would probably be too tightfisted to even give Akiho this much.”

I changed my opinion of Akiho’s sister, Mitsuyo. I thought that she and Akiho just didn’t get along, but it looked like things weren’t as simple as that. Like her father, she probably didn’t talk much about her feelings due to her personality.

“Goura Daisuke, please convey this to Akiho as well so that she doesn’t return this money. Sending it back to her again would be troublesome, you see.”

That’s when I tilted my head. Mitsuyo was talking as if it were a given that Akiho and I had a close relationship. Had Akiho told even her sister about us?

“Did you, by any chance, know about me?”

“What? Of course I did.” She knit her eyebrows in utter amazement.

“You took Akiho back home a long time ago and loudly introduced yourself saying, ‘My name is Goura Daisuke.’”

Then she added one more thing.

“I have good ears, you know.”

Nonetheless, I didn’t think my voice had reached the inside of the estate back then, which meant that Mitsuyo most likely would have been in the room facing out to the garden. Was she worried about her father standing on the stepping stones outside, or was she waiting for her half-sister who was young enough to be her

daughter?

Only Mitsuyo herself knew the true reason.

As we turned on to the intersection in front of Tsurugaoka Hachimangū and continued onto the uphill prefectural road, the van began to slow down due to the weight of the books piled in back.

We had already finished our work and were currently en route back to the Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia. The tops of the ginkgo trees gently glowed as they bathed in the light of the setting autumn sun.

“Let’s arrange the books tomorrow…after we return to the store and finish up for today.”

Shinokawa spoke so quietly I almost couldn’t hear her. This was the first thing she had said since we started driving. I was still in the process of calming down, but it looked like she hadn’t yet. As always, her face was red and she wasn’t talking much.

“Daisuke…make sure to get a good rest after we get back – tomorrow’s going to be busy.”

“Yes, of course….huh?”

I turned my head after answering. Daisuke? I looked over to the passenger’s seat and saw her covering her mouth with both hands.

“S-sorry. Kousaka was always calling you that so I accidentally…it looks like it rubbed off on me.”

“I don’t mind if you call me Daisuke.”

Being called that simply made me happy. It felt like we had gotten closer.

“Alright, I will.” She readily agreed.

“Daisuke….Daisuke….”

She softly repeated the word to herself as if trying to imprint its sound in her memory.

Come to think of it, this is what she meant when she said she wanted to try calling a guy by their first name.

“Then can I also call you Shioriko?”

I wanted to bring it up casually, but wasn’t sure it came across that way. At any rate, there was no reply. It was troubling that she didn’t say anything – not even a refusal.

The van went under a rockslide prevention arch and then down a hill. I cautiously looked at the side of her face. Her eyebrows were scrunched together and she had her eyes closed tightly. Rather than looking angry, it looked like she was enduring pain. Moreover, her breath was erratic.

“Shioriko?”

We were stopped at the traffic light in front of Kenchou Temple.

“…yes.”

She opened her eyes a little bit behind her glasses and responded in a weak voice.

With that, I understood. I leaned over and put my hand on her forehead. Sure enough, she had a high fever.

“Your cold hand….feels nice…”

She slurred again as a faint smile appeared on her face.

I had thought there was something odd about Shioriko. Her complexion was unusually good and she hadn’t take off her coat, even after we went inside. She was also having a harder time than usual solving the book’s mystery. There really wasn’t much else to it. This happened because she had overexerted herself while she wasn’t feeling well.

“…shit.”

I should have noticed it sooner.

The light turned green and I slammed on the accelerator.

(Incidentally, I began using Shinokawa’s given name during this confusion, so I’ll call her Shioriko from now on.)

The entrance to the main house was on the opposite side of the store.

I parked in the parking space and went around the van to open the passenger seat door from the outside. Shioriko took off her seatbelt with shaky hands and tried to use her cane to step out of the car. I watched with bated breath as the tip of her cane smoothly hit the floor and she fell forward.

“Ah.”

I reflexively reached out and managed to catch her before she hit the ground. The smell from her feverishly weak body made me feel lightheaded.

“I-it’s fine…..I can stand…”

I heard her faint voice. However, no matter how much I waited, Shioriko did not try to stand. She had completely run out of strength.

Looked like there was only one thing I could do here.

“Please hold on for a moment.”

I put my arms around her knees and back, and lifted her up. I lightly ran holding her up like that.

“Is it…heavy…?”

She had her arms wrapped tightly around herself.

“Not at all…it’s alright.”

To be honest, I couldn’t tell whether she was heavy or light because of my panic. I opened the door with the key I took out

from her jacket pocket and was met with a dead silence inside the house. It looked like Shioriko's younger sister, who lived with her, still hadn't come back from school.

Shioriko moved around uncomfortably, making her shoes fall to the ground. I kicked mine off as well. Her bedroom was on the second floor. I went through the creaky hallway and looked up at the steep set of stairs. Things would be pretty bad in the off chance that she tumbled down.

"If possible, could you hold on tight?"

My voice was hoarse with tension.

I wondered whether or not to wait a little longer, but she obediently wrapped her arms around my back. Her ample chest pressed against me more than I imagined it would, but I carefully began climbing up the stairs anyway. I could feel both her body heat and her pulse. I forced myself to focus on where I was stepping.

I carried Shioriko up to her room on the second floor while being careful not to bump into any of the mountains of books. I laid her down on the bed near the window and she let out an agonized breath.

Shioriko's fur-lined coat was buttoned up to the top. It would be better to at least take off that top layer of clothing. I hesitantly put my hand on the buttons and began unfastening them. Although, there was no helping it, I didn't really want anyone to walk in on me doing this—

"What're you doing?"

I heard a voice behind me. Startled, I turned around to see a ponytailed girl wearing a dark blue school blazer standing in the hallway with her arms crossed. This was Shioriko's younger sister, Shinokawa Ayaka.

"Ah, well…we just got back from a home visit, but it looks like she

has a fever.”

Before I could even finish my explanation, Ayaka rushed over to the bed, skillfully avoiding the mountains of books littered around the room.

“Ah—I knew it! Give me a minute, I’ll be right back!”

I was somehow able to avoid a misunderstanding. Ayaka ran out of the room and soon returned form downstairs with an ice pillow, towel, and a pitcher of water. After that, she took out some pajamas and underwear from the closet and tossed them onto the bed one after the other. I looked away from the underwear just in case.

“I even told you that home purchases were too much…here, open your mouth, Shioriko.”

Ayaka put the thermometer into her sister’s mouth while sighing. I only realized this recently, but it looked like the younger sister was the one who took charge of their household affairs. She was skilled at everything she did.

“Was her condition really that bad?”

“Mm, it was originally a light fever, but I think it got this bad because she had to teach you how to do the job and make preparations. She was up in the middle of the night writing various notes. Like how to greet customers and how to make purchase orders and stuff. “

“Eh…”

In other words, she pushed herself too far for my sake. The reason she was so strangely clear today was so that I could learn how it was done.

So it was something like that, huh.

I felt ashamed.

I hadn’t noticed anything at all today. Not about Shioriko and not

about Akiho.

“Well, at least it looks like she had fun. Shioriko, that is.”

Ayaka said as she took Shioriko’s arms out of her coat.

“Fun?”

“Yeah. She was like an elementary school kid on the day before a field trip.”

Shioriko needed to be changed into her pajamas, so I left the room.

The books piled high in the hallway were illuminated by the lights on the ceiling. There were different types of books compared to the last time I came up here. Rather, the amount had increased a little. If things continued like this, Shioriko’s books would most likely overflow downstairs.

It was completely dark outside through the window. This had been a long day. Fortunately, Shioriko’s fever was nothing serious. I was still worried, but the plan was to return home if things continued like this.

My eyes finally fell on a stack of books against the wall as my gaze wandered around the hallway. There was the spine of a book I remembered seeing once at the top of the stack— Sakaguchi Michiyo’s *Cra Cra Diary*.

“What’s this?”

It had been in the discount wagon before. It was originally part of Shioriko’s personal collection, but her copies of the book ended up being taken out to the store since she couldn’t bring herself to like it.

I picked up the book without thinking and made sure. This was definitely the same book. This meant that she still owned this book even though she wasn’t fond of it.

I tilted my head and set the book back on the stack. By chance, I

saw that part of a painting was poking out from behind the books. It was a white bird superimposed on a mountain of books. I also remembered seeing this painting.

I was told “Cra Cra” meant pigeon. I didn’t know if that was the same bird pictured here, but I had been curious about this painting ever since I first saw it. What on earth did the bottom part of the painting look like?

I reached out and grabbed the edge of the canvas. What ran through my head, for some reason, was the passage by Shiba Ryoutarou that I had heard earlier that day.

…I truly dislike the detectives that show up in mystery novels. Why do they have to go so far to uncover other people’s secrets? I cannot understand the source of that passion…

My hesitation lasted for only a moment. I wasn’t really a detective and didn’t know whether or not this was someone else’s secret. For all I knew, it could have just been placed here for no particular reason; just taking a look wouldn’t be a problem. I pulled the painting out from between the books and the wall. Painted on the canvas, I saw a young woman sitting on a chair. There were huge piles of books in the background and the white bird was perched on the chair.

The young woman with long black hair was wearing a white blouse and a long skirt. She was looking down at a book in front of her and there was a pair of glasses laying on her knee.

“Shioriko?”

The model looked like her.

I don’t know who painted this, but they were pretty skil —

No, wait a second.

There was still something strange. The watercolor-like paint had faded quite a bit and the canvas was slightly dirty.

At the very least this wasn’t painted in the last few years.

I looked closely at the painting’s corners, but couldn’t make out a title or the artist’s name. I tried flipping the canvas over to check the other side. There were some numbers scribbled in pencil on the back.

1980.6.24

“Eh…?”

I was at a loss for words. Almost exactly 30 years ago…that couldn’t be right. I looked at the woman in the painting again. No matter how you looked at it, the model couldn’t have been anyone but Shioriko. However, Shioriko hadn’t even been born 30 years ago——**which meant that this had to be someone else**.

Then who in the world was this a painting of?

I stood there in shock with my hand still on the canvas.

The sound of chirping birds could no longer be heard in the distance.

Chapter 3

Azhizuka Fujio. UTOPIA: The Final World War. Tsuru Printing

Come to think of it, I was pretty bad with origami as a child. The paper would get crushed whenever I tried to fold it and the other kids in the neighborhood would laugh at me. Perhaps it was because my hands and fingers were bigger than the average person's. Either way, there's no denying the fact that I wasn't any good—

—I was remembering things like that as I wrapped books in wax paper behind the counter. The wax paper was used to protect the books from getting damaged by the sun. All of the old books at Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia were covered with wax paper like that. The one I was currently struggling with was Ikenami Shoutarou's Sakuran. It was one of the books we bought from the Kousaka estate in Onarimachi the other day.

The cover was torn and yellowed and its overall condition was pretty bad. Books tended to become warped over long periods of time, so covering them with thin wax paper was by no means easy. I thought I had managed it this time, but the paper ended up being too small. After redoing it yet again, I somehow managed to get it right and placed the book on the pile of books going out to the store.

"Daisuke, did you put prices on them?"

I heard Shioriko's voice from behind me.

"Ah, sorry."

I had forgotten to do that. I lightly smeared some adhesive on the reverse side of the pre-prepared price label. The labels had to be attached with adhesive for books that did not have a slipcase. This

was also something that was hard to fix if it wasn't done right the first time. Peeling the label off unskillfully would leave behind residue.

I still felt a gaze at my back and turned around. Shioriko appeared from behind some books.

"What can I help with?"

"If you have a moment, there's something it'd like you to look at."

I went towards the books like she asked me to. The other side of the store counter was screened off by stacks of books piled up like bricks. This wall of books was built soon after the owner returned to the shop. She usually hid herself away behind it to manage mail orders and the like.

The computer placed at the corner of the L shaped desk was also hidden behind the wall of books.

"I was checking my mail just now and…"

She pointed to her monitor where there was an image displayed as part of an email. A couple was standing together with a blue sea visible in the background. A middle aged lady with a round face was flashing a peace sign next to an older man in dark sunglasses standing stiffly beside her.

These were acquaintances who had once come to sell a book to us: the Sakaguchi couple.

"Where are they now?"

"Ishigaki Island, they said."

They got back from an extended overseas trip last month and it looked like they wanted to try Okinawa this time. They were leisurely wandering around the islands and sent us emails like this whenever they went somewhere new.

"Southern islands…sure sound nice."

She had a raptured, faraway look in her eyes. Quite the unexpected reaction.

“Are you also want to travel to places like that?”

“Yes…I wonder what kind of antiquarian bookshops they have over there. I imagine their selection would quite be different from ours.”

Not an uncharacteristic response. She was definitely a hardcore bookworm.

“You wouldn’t go swimming or anything?”

“Eh, why would I?”

She seemed to have realized it after she spoke.

“That would be strange, I suppose. Going on vacation to look for books.”

“Not at all, sounds like it would be fun.”

“Is that what you really think?”

“Yeah.”

I was actually serious, by the way. Going somewhere with Shioriko and hearing her talk endlessly about books didn’t sound so bad. I’d enjoy it even if we didn’t go to any southern islands.

“Is that so…” Shioriko smiled happily.

It felt like she had become more open with me ever since the event with Akiho. She didn’t look away or mumble when she talked to me now. For her, it was a remarkable change.

Although I was happy about that, there was one thing I was curious about. That painting that I had found on the second floor of the main house—the one with the person completely identical to Shinokawa Shioriko. I couldn’t get it out of my head.

******

I was so shocked that day that I didn’t even notice the sliding

door opening while I had the painting in my hands.

“That person is…”

A voice came out of nowhere and almost made me jump. I turned around to see Shinokawa Ayaka standing behind me. She was holding the clothes she had taken off her older sister in front of her.

“Shinokawa Chieko….that’s our mother.”

“Mother….?”

I looked at the painting again. With her hair and clothes, she resembled the current Shioriko way too much. They even looked to be about the same age….no, she might have been a little younger.

“This was before she and my father got married, around the time she started working here. I heard that my mother was the one who asked someone to make the painting. I don’t know who that was though.”

Ayaka continued the story without any particular emotion.

“So your mother was an employee here?”

“Right.” She nodded.

“She was originally one of our regular customers. It was only after she started working here that it developed into a relationship.”

And then they got married and had two daughters—I was interested in what happened after that. I clearly remembered how Shioriko froze up when I asked about her mother before.

I understood that something hard to talk about must have happened, but it would be a waste not to ask after all this.

“What happened to your mother?”

“About that…she left us. It was ten years ago…I do think she’s still

alive though.”

I got a straightforward reply. In other words, she disappeared.

“She left…do you know the reason why?”

“I don’t really know. I was pretty young and dad and Shioriko didn’t want to talk about it. Maybe they didn’t know why either, I can’t say…but…”

Her tone suddenly became forceful.

“Goura, don’t ever bring up the topic of our mother if you want to get along with my sister. Just don’t.”

She took the painting out of my hands as she said that and put it back behind the pile of books. The white bird from before was the only part that was visible…just like it was when I first saw it.

“Shioriko’s face looks so sad whenever someone talks about our mother…”

******

I was inserting the waxpaper covered books into the bookshelves. Not a single customer had come in all morning despite it being a holiday today. With the autumn colors approaching their peak at the nearby Engaku and Meigetsuin temples, Kita-Kamakura was overflowing with crowds – but so far they had failed to reach the store.

I could hear the faint sound of typing from behind the counter. Shioriko was probably entering data on the books that were sold through mail order.

In the end, I learned barely anything about her mother. Of course, I wasn’t planning on forcing her to tell me, but the memory of dating Akiho without knowing anything about her had become a bitter one for me. I suppose I was attracted to this girl after all.

That was also the reason for my indecision. I wanted to know

what she was hiding in her heart, but taking her feelings into account, it wasn't something I could just ask her to tell me—

—There was the sound of a car engine outside.

I looked up and saw a minivan coming to a stop at the other side of the glass door. A man wearing glasses came out of the driver's seat and started to approach the entrance carrying a cardboard orange box.

I quickly went over to open the door for him.

"Are you here to sell these books?"

The man looked up at me. His hair was thinning slightly and was speckled with white. His facial features made it difficult to guess his age, but he looked to be in his late 30s to early 40s. He gave off the impression of being an earnest white-collar accountant. He was wearing a plain colored sweater with jeans and didn't have any particularly defining characteristics. It felt like I would quickly end up forgetting about him if we ever crossed paths.

"Yes…please."

His voice echoed throughout the store with surprising strength. I took the box from him and carried it behind the counter.

"Please fill this out"

I handed a ballpoint pen and the purchase form to the man who was nervously looking around the shop. Opening the cardboard box, I noticed the faint smell of cooking oil wafting up for some reason. It looked like it was filled with used books and old paperbacks, but the spines were blackened to the point where I couldn't read the titles. The tops of the books were completely covered in dust. I doubted they would sell for much.

"Is the owner of the shop available today? She has long hair and wears glasses."

The man spoke as he was filling out his address. Nishitomi,

Fujisawa City, Kanagawa Prefecture. It was about 20 minutes away from here in Kita-Kamakura. Perhaps he knew Shioriko from one of his previous visits to the store.

“If you’re looking for Shinokawa…”

Just as I turned to look behind me, Shioriko appeared from behind the counter leaning on her cane.

“I am the shop owner, Shinokawa. Welcome.”

The man stopped writing and looked her up and down. He stared at her intensely, looking to see if there was any mistake.

“Umm…is there something…?”

Shioriko asked uneasily and the man, as if coming to his senses, looked away.

“No, it was nothing. Excuse me.”

He looked embarrassed despite his age. Asking if Shioriko was around first thing was pretty suspicious behavior. I started to become a little skeptical of this man and his intentions. I wouldn’t want a repeat of the Toshio Tanaka incident.

“There is one thing I’d like to ask,” the man said.

“Y-yes…what is it?”

“Have you ever heard of Ashizuka Fujio’s *UTOPIA – The Final World War*?”

The color of Shioriko’s face changed. It was a title that I had never heard of…but the author’s name felt vaguely familiar.

“…the Tsuru Printing version?”

The tension could be heard in her voice.

“Yes…it’s a first edition, still in good condition.”

The shop owner paused briefly before continuing. I could clearly tell she was carefully choosing her words.

“I would need to take a look at it person but…does it still have a dust jacket?”

“No…I don’t think it has one.”

“…Our shop does not deal much with manga, so we can’t purchase it like a specialty shop would. However, it would likely be worth somewhere around one million yen.”

“Eh?”

I was the only one who exclaimed.

If the purchase price was one million yen, just how much would this book sell for? This might even be more valuable than the copy of Daizai’s *The Late Years* that Shioriko owned. It may have been an old book, but I could have never imagined there was manga worth that much.

“Is that so…sorry for asking such a strange question.”

The man lowered his head. Somehow, it felt like he had a pleased expression on his face.

“Do you have a copy of *The Final World War*?” Shioriko asked.

He only would have asked those questions if he already owned the book or intended to acquire a copy. We were waiting for the answer with bated breath when the man turned towards the glass door looking like he had forgotten something.

“My car…I probably shouldn’t have left it in front of the store like that. Where are the parking spots?”

That question was aimed at me. The road in front of the store was pretty narrow, it certainly would become a hindrance if he left his car there for too long.

“Ah, right. It’s on the other side of the building. Turn right on the road next to here and continue for a little bit. You’ll then see a sign for the parking lot. You should be able to find a free parking spot there.”

“I see. I’ll go park the car for now, in the meantime, could you begin appraising these books? I’ll be right back.”

He turned around and left the shop in a hurry. Appearances aside, he had a really strange personality. What was all that about *The Final World War* anyway?

“…anyway, why don’t we start going through these?”

Shioriko looked into the cardboard box. Ah well, we could always continue the talk when he got back. It looked like she thought the same.

However, no matter how long we waited, he never showed up. Just to be sure, I went to look at the parking spot in front of the main house. The minivan was nowhere to be found. The only thing in the parking lot was the shop van.

The strange man who asked us to appraise his books had suddenly disappeared.

We left the store in the van later that afternoon and asked Shioriko’s sister to watch the shop while we were away.

The cardboard box filled with books was in the back seat. At the Shioriko’s—store owner’s insistence that we couldn’t leave these books alone, we were headed off to meet their owner. Since the appraisal was already complete, the plan was to buy the books if their owner wanted us to. If not, then we would just return the books to him.

The purchase form that the man had left behind had the address only halfway filled out—Nishitomi in Fujisawa city. The partial address was the only thing written on the form; the name and phone number fields were left completely blank.

“Couldn’t we have kept it at the store for a little longer?”

I asked with my hands still on the wheel.

“The guy just left it with us on his own, even if we don’t go out of our way to deliver it…”

We didn’t know anything except his partial address. Even if we went there, I didn’t think we could find the exact house. That was, if he wrote down his real address in the first place.

“That is true, but there might be a chance that he really does own a copy of *The Final World War*. He apparently seemed to know that the first edition didn’t have a cover. In that case, there is value in delivering these books to him.”

For her to jump at this opportunity just from the man’s vague statements…it looked like this was an exceedingly rare book.

“*The Final World War*, was it? Is it really that rare?”

“Yes. The official title is *UTOPIA*, *‘The Final World War’* was something that the publishers decided to add on their own……this was the authors’ first individually published book, and they say that no more than ten copies still exist. It was considered to be an illusionary book amongst book enthusiasts until it appeared in used bookshops for the first time in 1980.”

“Ah, so it’s because it was famous. So who was this author, really?”

If I remembered correctly, the author was “Ashizuka Fujio”. The name was strange in that it looked like the names of several famous manga authors all cobbled together.

“Ashizuka Fujio was the pen name that Fujiko Fujio debuted with.”

“Ah…”

I was shocked speechless. This was the real deal, not just some cobbled together name.

Of course, even I knew who Fujiko Fujio was. Rather, there were probably few people in Japan who didn’t know. It was the name of

Japan's most famous manga artist, no, artist pair. However, they had broken up a long time ago and one of them had even passed away.

I used to buy their manga with my pocket money when I was a child. The font size was different which meant that I could read for long periods of time. The one I liked was Kiteretsu Encyclopedia. I think that's because the anime was airing right as I was becoming aware of my surroundings.

"When was it published?"

"In 1953…almost 60 years ago."

"Oh…so it was that old…"

It was written in my grandfather's generation. I knew they were active a long time ago, but I didn't know it was that long ago.

"That's right. Both of the authors were still teenagers when this was first published. It was normal for young people to debut in their teens during the new age of manga….the average age for creators was pretty low. Even Tezuka Osamu who was considered a veteran hadn't reached his 30s yet."

"Tezuka from the Tezuka Osamu Cultural Prize?"

"The very same. Their pen name was chosen as a homage to Tezuka Osamu. It meant that the character for "foot" in Ashizuka was lower than the 'hand' in Tezuka. The reason Tsuru Publishing asked them to write a volume was due to Tezuka Osamu's referral in the first place. It ended up being a huge boon for the manga artists who had only just debuted."

I got on the highway entrance ramp while she was talking. Traffic was particularly terrible due to the holiday. It wasn't much further to our destination, but we couldn't easily continue on. I saw people from a boxing gym training alongside the road.

"Shioriko, looks like you also know a lot about old manga."

Biblia hardly ever dealt with old manga, so I was under the impression that her specialty was in written text.

“I don’t really know all that much…”

There was a hint of bitterness in her voice. I felt that knowing this much meant that she was already plenty knowledgeable. I got off of the highway, drove past some large temple gates and eventually came to a stop at a residential area. I checked the map and confirmed that we were in the right general area.

“Quite a few houses here.”

I looked around the area. There were dozens of homes that fit the criteria we were looking for. Not only were there single family houses, there were also plenty of apartments.

“Looks like we’ll have to go around and check the houses one by one…”

If we found the guy, it would mean we were correct. Of course, Shioriko, who had a bad leg, wouldn’t be the one who had to walk around. That job would be left to me. Thinking about how long that would take was a little depressing.

“Please wait…rather than that, look for homes with rooms that meet the criteria I’m going to tell you. I think it’ll be faster that way,” Shioriko said.

“…It should have a room with a large, westward facing window with only a thin curtain hanging from it. In addition, that room should be near the kitchen area. I believe his book shelf is located in an area where the sun shines through the window. The man from earlier should be in a house like that.”

“How did you figure that out?”

“The books inside the box all had faded spines and were covered in dust. This was probably because they spent a long time in a bookshelf that was bathed in sunlight. In addition to that, there was the smell of cooking oil on the books. That was what made me

think that these books were stored somewhere near the kitchen. Considering that the smell of oil wasn't ventilated out, there's a high chance that we're looking for an older building."

"…makes sense."

I nodded. Looking at it now, it certainly seemed logical.

"You put a lot of thought into this, didn't you?"

"It's because I've been to a house like the one I just described to buy books before. The condition of the books back then was similar to these."

So it was insight that came from experience. I opened the van door and stepped outside. It felt like the number of possible choices had been narrowed down.

We spent a while walking around. Due to so many of the residences being so crowded together, I was unexpectedly unable to find one that let enough sunlight in from a westward facing window. With the exception of newly built homes, there weren't many options left.

Mm…?

I turned on to a rather quiet road and stopped in front of an old two storied apartment building. The apartment at the corner of the first floor had a large west facing window and I could see a bookshelf through the rough lace curtain. The exhaust vent installed near the window likely meant that this room was adjacent to the kitchen.

Even the outside of the exhaust vent was blackened because of the grime originating from the oil. It didn't look like it was cleaned often either. It perfectly matched Shioriko's criteria.

"So it's here…" I murmured to myself.

***

I matched Shioriko's walking speed, and we headed over to the

apartment building. We entered the premises through a rusty gate and stood in front of the door at the farthest corner of the building.

Just how old was this building? The bathroom window lattice had a wooden milk box attached to it. An old nameplate with “Suzaki” written on it hung from it.

“He’s in here, right?” I whispered to Shioriko.

“He’s probably waiting for us to arrive.”

“Eh?”

“There has to be some meaning to him leaving these books with us and bringing up *The Final World War*.”

“Meaning? What reason could he have had?”

“I’m not quite sure yet…”

I was starting to feel uneasy. If the man inside was planning something, then I would need to protect Shioriko.

She rang the doorbell. We heard the sound of someone approaching, and the door slowly opened. I put myself on guard in order to react quickly if something happened.

Standing in front of us was the bespectacled middle aged man from before.

“Mr. Suzaki, correct? We’re here about the books you left in our care earlier…”

A joyful expression suddenly appeared on the man’s face. He then reached out and clasped Shioriko’s hands, covering hers with his own.

“I knew it…I should have expected it….you actually found your way here…”

“Eh? Um…”

He abruptly let go of her hand and beckoned us inside.

“Please, come in…there’s something that I absolutely want to talk about with you.”

“What do you want to talk about?”

I cut him off.

He had somehow known that we would come here to deliver his books—or rather, he originally left the books at the store in order to get us to go to him. I couldn’t bring myself to causally enter his home without knowing what his intentions were.

“It is of course, about Ashizuka Fujio’s *The Final World War*…but not only that…”

Suzaki looked straight at Shioriko.

“I want to talk to you about your mother.”

At Suzaki’s invitation, we were led into the western facing Japanese style room that I had seen from outside. A wall lined with large doored cabinets came into view followed by a partition leading into the kitchen. Next to the partition was a thin, bare bookshelf. Suzaki had likely pulled the books he brought to Biblia from there.

Not only was there a window to the west, there was also a glass sliding door on the south side of the room overlooking a yard filled with overgrown weeds. The scenery, which probably hadn’t changed in years, gave off a strange atmosphere—as if time had stopped entirely.

We sat down one at a time, Shioriko with her legs at her side, her bad leg stretched out on the yellowed tatami mats. The entire room was so immaculately clean that it didn’t even feel like anyone lived there. It had the sort of dispassionate feel of a room right before someone moved in.

“This is my parents’ house…I used to live here with my father a

long time ago.”

Suzaki cordially explained as he returned from the kitchen and placed three teacups on the tray in front of us. Steam wafted up from the plain green tea.

“My father lived here alone ever since I graduated high school and became independent…he had a stroke and passed away last September.”

“My condolences.”

Shioriko lowered her head, and I did the same. I still didn’t get where he was going with this story. What on earth did this have to do with *The Final World War* and Shioriko’s mother?

“As I was clearing out the apartment and sorting through my father’s old things, I recalled something that had bothered me ever since I was child. It was something I had always wondered, and so, in order to find out the truth, I decided to play a bit of a trick on you.”

Suzaki suddenly sat up straight. With his posture rigid, he turned his knees to face Shioriko.

“How did you find this apartment without knowing the entire address? Surely you didn’t go around checking every single house in the area.”

“Oh…? Well…”

“Please tell me this first…I’m begging you!”

At his insistent pleas, Shioriko once again explained the reasoning that had led us to this house. Suzaki’s eyes shinned as he nodded along with every point she made. Once she had finished, he turned towards the now empty bookshelf.

“I see…”

He nodded deeply.

“So it definitely wasn’t just luck that time. It’s like something

right out of a story."

"What do you mean by 'that time'?" Shioriko asked.

"It's been 30 years now, but my father once went to the Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia to sell some books. He left his books at the store and went back home halfway through writing his address, just like I did. Despite that, your mother found this apartment and kindly returned the books to us. How was she able to do something like that? I was never able to figure it out, no matter how much I thought about it."

Shioriko stiffened the moment Suzaki said the word "mother," but he didn't appear to have noticed.

"I visited the store some years ago and found your father managing the shop alone……did your parents separate?"

"…yes."

She answered with a parched voice. The story I heard was that her mother had disappeared, but Shioriko's parents might have still gone through divorce procedures.

"Where is she now?"

"I don't know…"

"Is that so…"

Suzaki sighed.

"Your father didn't know how she had found this apartment either. I had given up on ever finding out the truth, but about ten days ago, as I was riding on the Yokosuka line, I happened to see your store from Kita Kamakura station. There I saw a woman with a striking resemblance to the one I had met thirty years ago happily pacing around the store's sign."

Shioriko blushed.

That was probably the day we went out to buy books from Akiho's estate. She had had to wait in front of the store while I

brought the car around from the back. So that's what she had been doing while waiting.

"I could tell at a glance that that woman was her daughter. I thought that perhaps, if she really was her mother's daughter, she would be able to do the same thing her mother had done. I would like to apologize for this."

Suzaki lowered his head to us as he said that. In short, it was a test to see if the same thing would occur if he recreated the circumstances of that day to the best of his ability. There was one thing I understood—Shioriko's mother had the same incredible book-related insight that her daughter did. Or rather, Shioriko had likely inherited those skills from her mother.

Shioriko did not show much of a reaction to Suzaki's apology; she looked preoccupied with something else.

"...My mother didn't just come to deliver the books thirty years ago, did she?"

Shioriko asked in a level tone. It sounded more like a confirmation than a question.

"Moreover, your father suddenly rushed out of the store hallway even though he had come to the shop to sell his books...does this not mean that there were extenuating circumstances? ...perhaps something related to *The Final World War*?"

Come to think of it, that question still remained.

Suzaki, his eyes wide in amazement, broke out into a smile.

"You really do resemble your mother...that's right. What I really wanted to talk about was *The Final World War*."

Suzaki stood up and flung open the doors to the cabinets lined up against the wall one at a time.

"Woah..."

I unconsciously let out a voice of admiration.

There were an unbelievable number of books by Fujiko Fujio crammed into the cabinets. *Obake no Q-tarou*, *Doraemon*, *Kaibutsu-kun*, *Perman*, and so on. There were even multiple editions of the same work, each and every one of them stored in vinyl book covers for safekeeping. The Kiteretsu Encyclopedia I had loved as a child was present as well.

Had I been an elementary schooler, I would have been overjoyed. This would be heaven for any Fujiko fan.

“My father and I collected Fujiko Fujio manga….what you see here is his collection.”

Shioriko and I looked over the shelf from end to end. Most of it was composed of manga volumes wrapped in vinyl book covers, but there were also monthly issues of CoroCoro magazine sticking out from the bottommost shelf.

“He even has CoroCoro…?”

I whispered the question to Shioriko; it didn’t look like he had any other magazines.

“Monthly CoroCoro Comics was originally centered around Fujiko Fujio’s manga. It had the publishing rights to all of the authors’ work, meaning that masterpieces like Doraemon could be read in a single magazine. The early issues of CoroCoro here would be worth a lot in antiquarian bookshops.”

She smoothly replied with a lively explanation.

“The first issues of CoroCoro came out when I was a child. I was still in elementary school during the Doraemon boom, but my father had been a Fujiko Fujio fan since their debut.”

Perhaps pleased with her answer, Suzaku cheerily spoke up. Clearly his father had a love for the manga artists spanning decades. It was no surprise that his son had inherited that obsession.

“…and this is the book that my father valued as much his own

life.”

He pulled an old looking book from out of the cabinet.

It looked like it was wrapped in multiple layers of vinyl.

“Ah”

Shioriko straightened her back and quickly moved closer. It was my first time seeing her ever move so quickly.

On the red cover was a green robot standing next to a boy holding a gun. The title, *UTOPIA: The Final World War*, was printed above them. I leaned forward without thinking. This was an illusionary book that barely had any existing copies. I probably wouldn’t get another chance to see this in my life.

“…would it be alright if I took a look inside?”

Shioriko said a little nervously.

“Of course. I wanted Biblia books to look at it”

Suzaki carefully took the book out of its vinyl bag, and handed it over to Shioriko. The edges of the pages were a little yellowed, but the cover had almost no visible damage. Even an amateur like me could tell it was in good condition.

The price was printed conspicuously on the spine, 130 yen. There was no doubt that no one of that time would have ever imagined that it would be worth some hundreds of thousands of yen sixty years later.

In order to confirm, Shioriko started carefully turning through the pages. The vivid two-color pages were attention grabbing. Passing over the publication info, her hand stopped at the two page spread on the back cover.

“This is…”

There was a label from Antiquarian Bookshop Biblia attached. Under the title, *The Final World War*, was the price, 2000 yen.

“T-this was sold at our shop?”

But it was only 2000 yen.

Shioriko took the label and brought it closer to her eyes in order to confirm.

“This is my mother’s handwriting,” she bitterly muttered at length.

“My father purchased this book from Biblia thirty years ago…”

Suzaki began to speak, with faraway eyes as if he was searching for a memory.

“The reason he ran out of the shop in the middle of the evaluation…was because of this.”

“Manga collections aren’t all that rare nowadays, but during my father’s time, there weren’t many people who meticulously preserved their manga. It was, after all, something made for children to enjoy. The sort of thing you read until it’s worn out and then throw away.

“I think my father collected manga because he wanted to become a professional manga artist. During his middle and high school days, he even enthusiastically sent submissions to magazines. He had to give up on that dream in the end, but never stopped collecting manga.

“He used to have a considerable number of secondhand manga from Tezuka Osamu and the like in his youth, but since those were becoming harder to collect due to their rising cost, he began collecting only the works of his favorite manga artists, Fujiko Fujio.

“My father was a serious man of few words who didn’t have any particular hobbies apart from collecting old manga. After his wife…my mother, passed away when I was six, he associated with people less and less and only occasionally got in touch with his

fellow manga enthusiasts.

“If we had any common interests, it would have been Fujiko manga. He wasn’t like other parents who would take away manga from their kids. In fact, he was more than happy to give me recommendations on what to read. Even so, he was someone who took very good care of his collection. Due to that, it didn’t take long for me to learn how to properly handle old books.

“The one book my father wanted to get his hands on at any cost was *UTOPIA: The Final World War*. He apparently purchased a copy when he was in elementary school, right after it was released. My father loved the book, but one day his parents found it and ended up throwing it out. He tried buying another copy, but wasn’t able to find one anywhere.

“When I was in elementary school…it was summer in 1980, this book first appeared in the secondhand book market. It was on display at a Tokyo specialty comic shop storefront. It was even featured in the newspaper, and had become a hot topic among enthusiasts. For people without much money like us, it was at a price we couldn’t afford.

“Despite this, my father still left to see it as soon as he could. Perhaps he wanted to confirm its existence with his own eyes. Despite his efforts, he made it to the shop only to find that someone had already stolen the book.

“To once again be unable to see the book that he loved so much, it must have been a huge shock. My father was depressed for quite a while afterwards. He started drinking what felt like every night. All because of how much he loved that book.

“Two weeks passed, and one day, he suddenly said, ‘Let’s go for a drive,’ and went out. I thought for sure that his mood had improved. The plan was to go to the Hachiman Shrine in Kamakura first, and then go a little further to have dinner in Yokohama.

“It was during this excursion that we stopped by Biblia Books. We didn’t have much money, so he probably wanted to sell some of the books he didn’t need to make sure we had enough for dinner that evening. I glimpsed into the box as I was helping him pack the books and there wasn’t anything particularly valuable.

“He stopped the car in front of the shop and the lady behind the counter raised her head. With long black hair and pale skin…it’s embarrassing to say this to you as her daughter, but she was a shocking beauty even in my childlike mind. She smiled at us and ran over to ask if we were there to sell a book.

“My father answered yes, and she directed him to park the car on the other side of the building…I couldn’t take my eyes off of her as they talked.

“After moving the car over to the parking spaces as instructed, my father went out to the store alone carrying the cardboard box full of books. I was told to wait in the car, but was still curious about the lady from earlier. Just as I decided to open the door and go into the shop anyway, my father, blue in the face, suddenly returned and jumped into the drivers’ seat.

“When I saw *The Final World War* just sitting there in the seat side pocket, I couldn’t believe my eyes. I knew this was the manga that he had always been looking for. I asked him why he had it, but my agitated father hardly said a thing.

“Perhaps he noticed this book on the shelf as he was asking your mother to appraise the books he brought in. When he saw that it was being sold for only 2000 yen, he completely forgot about his own books and bought *UTOPIA* before running out of the store….that’s what I think happened.

“Well, looking at it now, it’s an unbelievable story, though I didn’t think anything of it at the time. Old manga was only starting to rise in value and the really high priced ones tended to be Tezuka Osamu’s early works. It seemed there were very few shops that

paid attention to Fujiko Fujio. Not to mention that *The Final World War* was written under a different pen name. The reason it was an illusionary book was because there weren't many people who understood its worth.

"Our drive ended up being canceled that day. My father wasn't in any condition to drive, and more importantly, I didn't think he had enough money left after paying for the book. He tried to pacify me saying he'd take me somewhere the next week, but I was still bitterly disappointed and didn't stop complaining.

"I think my father still felt bad for me all the same. After we got back to our apartment, he handed *The Final World War* to me. It was like he was saying that I should read it first. Even so, he soon went out, leaving me behind to wallow in my disappointment. He had borrowed the car from some close relatives and needed to return it.

"Since I was all alone and had no one to complain to, I started reading *The Final World War*. I was also a big Fujiko Fujio fan, you see. I was curious about what kind of story it was.

Do you know what this manga is about?"

He suddenly asked us a question.

"…I don't."

Shioriko nodded next to me as I answered. It seemed she knew what it was about. Suzaki hesitated for a moment and then turned to me to begin his explanation.

"At the beginning of the story, a political prisoner and his son are being held in an underground shelter and used as experimental test subjects. An enemy nation drops their new weapon…an ice bomb to freeze over the entire city. When the bomb falls, the boy is thrown into a state of suspended animation.

"A hundred years pass and the boy awakens after being rescued. With his memories of his father now missing, he's taken to an

enormous utopian city without any idea of what's going on. He then gets embroiled in the conflict between the government, which is using robots to control the people, and the united human resistance.

"I thought the art was old fashioned at first, but was drawn into the story as I kept reading. Perhaps I felt a special connection to the story because my father still hadn't returned after such a long while. It made me uneasy thinking about what would happen if I got separated from my father, just like the protagonist in the manga was. I later learned that he was taking so long because he got caught up gossiping with our relatives…but it was sensitive time for me, you know.

"I was hesitating over whether I should continue reading *The Final World War* or got out to meet my father when the doorbell suddenly rang.

"I opened the door and was astonished. The person standing in front of me was the lady from Biblia books…that is, your mother. She presented a paper with only one part of our address written on it and asked me, 'Did your father write this?'

"When I silently nodded, she pointed at the large cardboard box at her feet. It seemed she had come to deliver the books that my father had left at her shop.

"Since we couldn't decide what to do with the books without asking my father, I asked her to wait for him in this room. Your mother sat exactly where you're sitting right now and curiously looked around the room. We had these cabinets even back then, and she seemed to want to know what was in them. She asked me to open the cabinet, so I agreed to show her just a little. I wasn't really supposed to show it to other people, but at the same time I wanted to show off my father's amazing collection.

"Just as I had hoped, she was completely shocked when she saw it for the first time. However, not only was she a real Fujiko Fujio

fan, she started talking knowledgeably about all of the books there. She didn't just talk about the famous kids' oriented manga, she knew even more than I did about the adult manga like *The Illustrated Biography of Mao Zedong* and *Minotaurus's Plate*.

"It actually made me, who thought he knew everything about Fujiko Fujio, pretty upset. It was dumb of me, thinking about it now, but I still tried to make up for my wounded pride. I took *The Final World War* that I had been reading and stuck out my chest.

"'Did you know that Ashizuka Fujio was actually Fujiko Fujio's pen name? I bet you didn't know that. It's a super rare manga that my dad was always looking for.'

"I didn't even consider the fact that my father had just bought *UTOPIA* from Biblia for cheap. I just wanted to surprise the person in front of me…to make the point that I really knew what I was talking about. She certainly seemed surprised.

'Is that so…I had no idea…'

"She then suddenly moved forward to lean over me. I ended up being too shocked to move since there was now so little distance between us.

'You taught me a lot. Thank you.'

"She said what I wanted to hear, what I wished she would say. I can only imagine that my face was bright red as I sat on the floor that day.

It's embarrassing to say this now, but for me, your mother was my first love…"

Suzaki stopped talking to catch his breath. Shioriko was sitting straight up and listened to him without moving. *The Final World War* lay on her lap, free of its vinyl protective covering.

"… I agree with what you said earlier, that your mother must

have had some other reason to deliver the books that day. I think she realized that there was something strange going on from the way my father ran out of the store so suddenly. She must have come to our house to confirm her suspicions. She had a passion for her work and a sharp intuition…just like the two of you right now."

Shioriko's shoulder twitched in reaction. She slowly looked at Suzaki as if she was waking up from a dream. I couldn't tell what she was thinking now.

"… Did my mother read this manga?"

"Yes…I let her read it since she said she wanted to use it for future reference. She read it like she was trying to burn it into her eyes, you know. She was so engrossed in it that she started happily whistling. It was a little rough and she wasn't very good at it, but I thought it was still charming."

I held back a laugh. Looks like that strange whistling habit was something Shioriko had inherited from her mother. Since Shioriko didn't realize that she also had the same habit, she didn't show any interest.

The more I heard, the more it felt like Shioriko's mother resembled Shioriko. She wasn't as introverted, but like her daughter, she was a bookworm who was passionate about her work and possessed an incredible amount of book related knowledge. Their relationship must have certainly been good — maybe the reason Shioriko avoided the topic of her mother was because she went through a lot when she disappeared.

"That's when my father came back home. He was pretty shocked to see someone from Biblia Books at our house. Your mother explained how she had arrived to return his books and how, since she didn't know much about *The Final World War*, she wanted him to teach her more about it. She put her hands on the ground and lowered her head as she made that request.

“Since this was in a time before the internet, the only way to obtain information on old books was to either go around antiquarian bookshops buying books or to ask someone knowledgeable. My father was one of the few experts on the old works of Fujiko Fujio so he was a good person to ask.

“They spent quite a lot of time talking about various things in this room after that. I was asked to leave since it was a conversation for adults, however…”

Suzaki sounded truly disappointed as he said that.

“Perhaps my father was moved by her enthusiasm…no, he may have also felt bad for having bought *UTOPIA* for cheap, but he eventually sold a large part of his collection of early works to Biblia. It was rare for him to let go of any of his books.”

“Could you please tell me which books he sold?”

“I can’t remember clearly, but there should have been a lot of books that would be worth a small fortune today. When I checked later, some of the magazine supplemental materials like “The 3 Brothers and the Human Cannon” and “The Terrifying Uran Island” had disappeared from this bookshelf.”

“Did your father own a lot of magazines and supplemental materials?”

“Yes…at that point my father’s collection was mostly made up of magazines. The focus switched to collected volumes after that.”

Suzaki stood up and pulled a nearby volume from out of the cabinet; it was a manga titled Senbee.

“The manga here overlaps greatly with my own collection. I’m not going to let go of *The Final World War* since it’s a memento of my father, but I was thinking of selling everything besides what’s on this bookshelf to Biblia Books. You can name the price.”

“Oh.”

At last, Shioriko's expression changed. Suzaki had an embarrassed grin on his face.

"It's an apology for having you come out here to return the books and thanks for selling us *The Final World War* 30 years ago. There are some items that have lowered in value since the Fujiko F Fujio complete works anthology was published, but I also have first editions of every volume of Fujiko Fujio Land and even a few issues of Mushi Comics. How does that sound?"

I didn't know how much the manga Suzaki mentioned were worth, but he was making it sound like a considerably good deal for the shop. Perhaps the person he really wanted to sell the collection to was his first love, Shioriko's mother. Since he couldn't do that, he was trying to sell it to the daughter who had inherited her qualities.

However, it was up to Shioriko to make the final decision. She had an expression as if she was thinking hard about something and her fist was pressed to her upper lip.

"… Shioriko."

She came back to her senses when I called her name.

"Y-yes…thank you very much. We'd certainly be interested in purchasing them. We'll need to take the books back with us first, and will get in touch with you afterwards for the valuation. Does that work?"

"Yeah, it's fine. Actually…could you also take the books you brought back and assess those as well?"

"Of course."

Of course, I would be the one carrying them all to the van. If I remembered correctly, there should have been some vinyl cord and a utility knife in the dashboard. Just when I stood up to start taking the books out,

"Thank you for showing me this today…I learned a lot."

Shioriko handed *The Final World War* back to Suzaki.

“Was the book in this condition when it was originally purchased?”

“I believe so. My father just put it in a vinyl wrapper. Compared to how it was thirty years ago, it’s barely changed at all.”

“I see…and, um…when the books were first brought into the shop 30 years ago…where did you get the cardboard box they were carried in?’

“Huh?”

Suzaki made a perplexed face at the unexpected question. I was silently watching Shioriko’s profile. Her face, which had no traces of makeup, was even paler than usual.

“What was it now…I don’t really remem…wait, it was from the closet. There were several boxes that had books nobody really cared about, so I just took one and added the books from the shelf into it…is something wrong?

“Ah…no, nothing in particular. I was just curious is all …”

Shioriko answered in a faltering, ambiguous tone. It seemed she had no intention of providing any further explanation.

“Did your father, say, mention anything about my mother?”

Suzaki looked upwards, searching through his memory. The light from the western window dimmed as the sun continued to set. We would need to start turning on the lights before long.

“Nothing in particular…like I said earlier, he was a man of few words. Ah, there was one thing though. He said something odd while he was drinking some time afterwards. If I remember correctly, it was something about Biblia Books being a third party.”

Shioriko’s hand gripping her cane froze for a moment.

“Was it, by any chance…a ‘bonafide third party’?”

“Ah, yes, I think that’s what it was. What does it mean?”

She only smiled weakly in reply.

It was almost dusk by the time we finished packing the large number of books into the van and left Suzaki’s apartment. The other cars coming and going already had their headlights turned on.

We had originally gone to deliver, but it ended up taking longer than expected.

“Are you going to appraise them after we get back to the shop?”

“Yes…I was thinking we should get this done by today.”

Although Suzaki said that getting the appraisal price tomorrow wouldn’t be a problem, it seemed Shioriko had no intention of putting it off until later.

Perhaps she inherited that work ethic from her parents. I thought about her mother while driving. Going by what we heard in Suzaki’s story, she was by no means an ordinary person. Rather, she was just like Shioriko. Being called ‘bonafide’ didn’t sound like a bad thing, so I didn’t think her mother was acting out of ill will towards others. I stopped in front of a red light and glanced at the passenger seat. Shioriko was fiddling with a small paper on her knee. There wasn’t much light in the car, but I was able to make out the “2000 yen” written on it.

That was the label for *The Final World War*.

“Why do you have that?”

“I asked Suzaki for permission.”

She had on a fierce look that hadn’t been there until now as she fixed her eyes on the paper in her hands. It didn’t take long to realize she was angry.

“I couldn’t leave this behind…I just cannot believe that a label like this would be attached to that book.”

The ends of her words slightly shook. She was probably talking about how *The Final World War* was priced at 2000 yen.

“But that’s all in the past, right? It was just a mistake …”

“I’m not talking about the price. This has nothing to do with that.”

“… What is it about then?”

“Don’t make me talk about my mother!”

Her shout resounded throughout the car. She seemed even more startled by her voice than I was. She limply settled down into her seat as if she had used up all her strength.

“I’m sorry…but I only thought it would become an unpleasant memory for you too even if I told you. I don’t like remembering my mother.”

The light turned green and I pressed down on the accelerator. We were passing a botanical garden in Ofuna. A broadcast could be faintly heard from inside the garden announcing the end of business hours.

“You don’t have to talk about it if you don’t want to.”

I spoke.

“But saying that you don’t want to remember means that it’s something you can’t forget, right?… If you ever do want to talk about it, I’ll always be here to listen.”

“Why?”

She turned to look at me. Being asked so straightforwardly was troubling.

“How do I say this…it’s because, I want to know you better.”

I said something that wouldn’t even be said in a confession, but even so, it wasn’t embarrassing. I continued driving without looking at her face and heard a low whisper reach my ears.

“Please go somewhere without many people.”

“Eh?”

“I want the two of us to talk someplace quiet.”

If it were someone else who said that, it might have carried some other meaning. But for Shioriko, it meant exactly what she said.

“Would the sea be fine?”

“Yes.”

I turned onto an intersection on the overpass and headed southwest on a road alongside the Kashio River. If we continued like this, we’d exit onto a highway along the coast. It would probably be abandoned at this time during this season.

“By the way, there was something I was curious about.”

It would be uncomfortable for the silence to continue, so I opened my mouth.

“How did the story in *The Final World War* continue? I only heard until the part where the protagonist lost his memories and somehow got embroiled in a conflict.”

“… the government was using the power of robots to oppress the people and the human alliance was rebelling against them. Then the robots gained sentience and began fighting against humanity itself.”

She began telling the story in a slower, more contemplative tone than usual.

“Humanity united against them, but were no match for the robots’ overwhelming technological might and was eventually pushed to the brink of total destruction. The protagonist regained his memories just before he was about to die and ran to the shelter in order to meet his sleeping father in his final moments.

“The main theme in this story is humanity’s struggle against the robots…but for me, I think it’s also a story about a child trying to

live without his parents.”

I remembered Suzaki. For him, who really did lose his father, *The Final World War* held deep meaning, now more than ever. He surely remembered his father every time he read it.

“To have something like parents you would want to see once again…is enviable.”

After a long silence, she muttered this to herself as she looked out the window.

We passed by the Enoden Kamakura Koukoumae station and I parked the car in a spot near the railroad tracks.

We crossed the street without talking and descended down to Shichirigahama Beach from the breakwater stairs. Now that we were closer to the waves, the pitch black sea suddenly felt a whole lot bigger. I could see the lights of Enoshima shining towards Koyurugi Cape. There was no sign of any ships off the coast, the calm night sea stretched on unbroken.

Shioriko stopped walking right before we reached the water’s edge. Since there weren’t any people nearby, we didn’t have to worry about anyone overhearing anything we said.

“…Daisuke.”

Her long black hair swayed in the cold sea breeze. It was only when she brushed at it with her free left hand that I noticed she was still holding the label from before.

“Do you really believe that my mother knew nothing about *The Final World War*?”

“Eh…?”

I didn’t really understand the meaning behind the question.

“I learned everything I know about old books…including old manga, from my mother. She told me that she was fairly

knowledgeable about old books even before she started working at the shop. The fact that we have a few shelves of old manga in the store is because she was the one who began buying them. That she would sell it for 2000 yen is simply unthinkable."

"But isn't that what was written on the label?"

"Don't you think the label itself is unnatural? The book didn't have a slipcover, yet the label wasn't pasted on."

"Ah…"

Come to think of it, the policy at Biblia was to paste the labels on all books that didn't have slipcovers.

"Maybe he peeled it off after buying the book."

"Peeling it off without leaving any residue on neither the book nor the label would be difficult at best. Moreover, that book was not wrapped in wax paper when it was purchased…we do that for all old books at our shop, right?

I nodded. It was what I had been doing all morning.

"Suzaki said that the book was still in the same condition it was in thirty years ago. Even when his father ran out of the shop, the book was uncovered…..I don't believe there's any way this book could have come off our shelves."

"Then where on earth did it come from?"

I couldn't understand the reasoning. If the book was never on our shelves, then how did Suzaki's father buy it?

"If this book could not have been sold at our shop, there's only one possible place it could have come from.

The Final World War was mixed into the books that Suzaki's father brought into the shop that day."

"What?"

My eyes went wide. This story was starting to make less and less

sense.

“So you’re saying he never bought it from our shop to begin with.”

“That’s what I’d like to believe. It must have carelessly gotten mixed up in the box of unneeded books that he brought into the shop. Try to remember what Suzaki said. He never actually saw his father buy *The Final World War*…he only saw him return to the car with the book in his arms.”

“But wasn’t this the book his father was always searching for? Was that also a lie?”

“That part was actually true…he most likely got his hands on it a few weeks before coming to the shop, but circumstances necessitated that he keep it hidden.”

Shioriko gazed out at the sea.

Suzaki’s story suddenly came back to me. A few weeks before… come to think of it, he did say that his father went out to Tokyo after *The Final World War* was discovered for sale at a specialty comic shop there. Maybe he bought it then. No, the story continued from there…

He made it to the shop only to find that someone had already stolen the book.

A chill ran up my spine.

“Don’t tell me…”

This explanation wasn’t necessarily the actual truth. It was merely Shioriko’s conjecture that Suzaki’s father was the person who stole *The Final World War*.

“I don’t have any proof right now…so everything I say after this is my own speculation.”

She began with that preface and continued the story in a subdued voice.

“Suzaki’s father went all the way to Tokyo to see *The Final World War*. I can understand why he would snatch it after seeing the illusionary book he had loved ever since he was a child right in front of him on display in the shop window.

“Of course, he was tormented by the knowledge of his huge crime. He returned home with a sullen face, and then spent the next few weeks depressed. His mood didn’t clear up even when he drank.

“Anyway, he had a change of heart and made plans to go out for a drive with his son. He figured he could sell some of the books he didn’t need any more in order to add to his meal funds a little… that’s when things began to go wrong.

“The stolen book must have been stowed away at the bottom of the cardboard box in the closet; he couldn’t keep it with the rest of his collection, you see. His son, who was helping him arrange the books, put everything they were planning to sell into that cardboard box. Suzaki’s father brought the box over to Biblia none the wiser and requested that my mother assess the books.

“When he saw my mother pull *The Final World War* out of the box, he must have had a heart stopping moment. There was no doubt that my mother was aware of the manga’s value; perhaps she even recognized it as the book from the recent robbery.

“He then lost his composure and hightailed out of the shop, leaving the rest of his books behind as he fled back home. Since the only thing he wrote on the purchase form was his partial address, my mother never got his name or phone number. Even the car he was using that day didn’t belong to him…he must have felt some relief knowing that unless something unexpected happened, there was no fear of anyone being able to identify him.”

What he didn’t count on was the women at Biblia’s uncommon level of perspicacity. Sure enough, “something unexpected” did

end up happening.

“With the clues he left behind, my mother had no problem finding out where he lived. She might have even guessed at things like his occupation, hobbies, education, and even family composition.”

“How would she understand something like that?”

“My mother always used to say that you could get a general understanding of a person’s nature by looking at the books they owned. It was similar to profiling…something that she had an unbelievable amount of success with. I don’t think there’s anyone else that could do it that well.”

“So you can’t do it either?”

“Of course, not even me.”

Her immediate response surprised me.

I couldn’t imagine anyone being more knowledgeable about books than she was—it was even a little unsettling.

“I don’t believe that my mother was completely certain that *The Final World War* was a stolen book when she arrived at their house, of course. It was probably Suzaki’s story that confirmed it for her.

“He had misunderstood where the book came from, but what he told her contained some important information. His father, the Fujiko Fujio maniac who had been searching for this book for so many years, was keeping where he obtained it a secret even from his son. When she said that he taught her a lot, I think she was referring to that.”

It felt like the story we heard earlier today had a completely different subtext. If I took Shioriko’s reasoning to be completely correct, Suzaki’s heart had been stolen by the thanks that Shioriko’s mother said ironically. It was an extremely heart wrenching story.

“Then what about when she lowered her head to Suzaki’s father?”

“When she said that she didn’t know anything about the book and asked Suzaki’s father to teach her, it was simply an implied threat asking him to confess everything. The reason Suzaki was sent out of the room after that was because the ensuing conversation was not meant for children to hear.

“Reporting the crime to the police, recommending that he give up peacefully, and returning the book would have been the normal way to resolve this incident. However, my mother was not that type of person.”

“What kind of person was she?”

I unintentionally blurted out a question. Shioriko tightly chewed her pale lips.

“I’d rather not have to talk about that, but…”

She shook her head and added

“No, it’s fine…my mother was incredibly intelligent…but even then she didn’t realize the things she did were sometimes cruel. She could coolly make underhanded business transactions almost as if it were a game. I think she laid down some harsh demands that time as well.”

“Like asking him to hand over *The Final World War*?”

“She probably considered it. But if she did that, it would be hard for her to sell the book after she got her hands on it. She could be accused of a crime if she knowingly bought and sold stolen books…so in exchange for keeping silent about this incident, she demanded the rest of the valuable books from his collection.”

“Eh?”

“Most of the books we got today weren’t very old, and the same is true of the books he had in his room. None of them had been

published yet in 1980 and there were barely any books that would be worth a lot. It seemed Suzaki's father owned quite a few early publications that would gather some attention even at the time… special magazines, supplemental materials, and the like. Until 1960, it was common for monthly manga magazines to have extra supplemental materials. It would be natural for someone who had been their fan since their debut to have them…my mother most likely took all of that away from him.

"Did she pay him for the books?"

"That I don't know. Regardless, Suzaki's father should have put up some resistance. Weren't we told that he rarely let go of anything in his collection? I think my mother decided to write this as a trump card in order to persuade him."

She held out the label with "2000 yen" written on it. The slip of paper fluttered in the growing wind. I thought for a moment.

"Decided to write it….meaning that this was written afterwards?"

"Yes, Suzaki misunderstood and was under the impression that his father had purchased the book from Biblia. My mother took this misunderstanding and expanded it into a lie. She proposed it as a way to deal with the off chance that it came to light that he had the stolen book. This label was a prop for that sake."

"A prop…how would you do something like that?"

"Daisuke, are you familiar with the term 'bona fide third party?'"

"…no."

The word somehow carried the image of a virtuous person judging by how it sounded.

"It's a legal term."

"Legal term?"

"Yes. For example, let's say a book store like ours came into a stolen item. We bought it without knowing it was stolen and even

if we ended up selling it to another customer, we essentially could not be accused of committing a crime. A third party who acts as an unknowing intermediary in a transaction…that is what's called a 'bona fide third party' in civil law. This paper was circumstantial evidence to prove that my mother and Suzaki's father were acting as 'bona fide third parties.'"

I tilted my head to the side. I was trying to organize this in my head, but it wasn't going well.

"I'm sorry, could you make it a little easier to understand…"

"Let's say that this label was in fact the real thing, it would mean that someone else sold *The Final World War* to our shop. At the same time, it would mean that my mother sold it for only 2000 yen because she was ignorant of its true value. In other words, it makes it apparent that the book was bought and sold without knowing that it was a high-value stolen item.

"In essence, my mother invented a fictitious criminal that was completely unrelated to them. If they made up a story that the book was unknowingly purchased from this 'criminal' and then sold, then no one could be accused of a crime."

It all felt so convoluted. I could more or less understand what had happened now. It was basically that the victim would only be able to seek recourse from the criminal themselves.

"Would that really work so easily?"

"It didn't necessarily need to, you see. Even if they were now bona fide third parties, there was still the possibility that they would be obligated to return the book…but I don't think my mother explained those points one by one. The point was that she was able to persuade Suzaki's father…not that it matters anymore since it's hit the statute of limitations by now."

She used her left hand and her tooth to tear the label apart. After that she let it fly off into the night sea. The paper was easily swallowed by the white waves and disappeared in the blink of an

eye.

“Now do you understand what kind of person my mother was? She was someone who was knowledgeable about books, and had a sharp mind as well as an incomprehensible character…she disappeared ten years ago and hasn’t been in contact since.”

The conversation suddenly touched upon the crux of the issue. I took a deep breath in order to alleviate some of the tension.

“Did she leave behind a message?”

“I don’t believe so…she did leave me one book, however.”

“A book?”

“Daisuke, I think you’ve already heard of it…Sakaguchi Michiyo’s *Cra Cra Diary*.”

I did see those in her room before. If I remembered correctly, that was the essay collection by Sakaguchi Ango’s widow, I think. I remembered taking them out to the discount cart afterwards.

“You mean the ones that were put up for sale in the discount cart?”

“No, those weren’t the ones that my mother left behind…she would often gift me books. It was because she liked to express her feelings with books. When I saw the copy of *Cra Cra Diary* that she left behind for me, I quickly understood what she had done.”

“…What did she do?”

It felt like she wanted me to ask that question.

“I think she found another lover. In *Cra Cra Diary*, the author recounts how she left her very young child behind and ran off to be with Ango .”

An oppressive silence hung over the seashore. It felt like I finally understood the reason why she said she couldn’t bring herself to like the *Cra Cra Diary*.

“Why do you think I didn’t reveal the truth to Suzaki earlier?”

Shioriko was still staring out into the dark sea. It was a starless, cloudy night.

“Wasn’t it because there isn’t any proof anymore….and more importantly, you didn’t want to trample over his important memories?”

I answered her after thinking for a short while. That his father was a criminal who stole his precious book, and that his first love took advantage of that to extort his father out of the rest of his collection…you probably wouldn’t find someone who’d want to know a “truth” like that anywhere.

“There’s that but, there’s also a bigger reason…”

She fell silent for a moment. I could see that she was strongly clenching her teeth. She looked as if she might burst into tears.

“I thought he would not want to sell his manga to us if I revealed everything to him…in the end, what I did isn’t much different from what my mother did thirty years ago. I visited the apartment lured by *The Final World War*, and left with the rest of his books for cheap. I really have no right whatsoever to condemn what my mother did. My mother and I really resemble each other, just like Suzaki said….”

An especially cold wind blew towards the sea. Shinokawa pulled her body in, bracing herself against the cold. Almost unconsciously, I moved to wrap my arms around her slightly trembling shoulders.

“I’m never planning on getting married ever in my life.”

I stopped moving at the sudden, unexpected announcement. What on earth was she saying?

“No matter who I marry, no matter what kind of happy family I make, someday, just like my mother, I’ll probably end up leaving them behind. I don’t have the confidence to say that I won’t.”

She probably didn't see me as someone of the opposite sex, but why did it feel like a roundabout rejection? I couldn't imagine this eccentric, yet serious person going out with anyone without having marriage as a condition.

"Let's get going, Daisuke."

Her voice was already back to how it usually was. She used her cane to change her direction little by little and started walking towards the stairs.

"Thank you for listening to what I had to say…it was a little refreshing."

I, on the other hand, far from feeling refreshed, felt gloomy. Regardless, I continued after her.

"So about the *The Final World War*…how did it end?"

I directed the question at the head of long black hair in front of me. I couldn't think of anything to say in this situation besides that.

"…the protagonist managed to reach the shelter after a struggle. He embraced his unmoving father swearing that they would never be separated again…however, one of the robots managed invade the shelter and moved to kill the protagonist."

Looking down at her feet, as if to match her step, she slowly explained.

"Thereupon his father woke up and shot the robot down. On the other side, the robots on the surface, who were on the cusp of gaining total control, had their electronic brains addled by the radioactivity and began annihilating one another. The story ends with the boy and his father, once again united, look upon the earth's surface after the wars' end."

"…it's a nice ending."

I told her my honest impressions.

"Yes, I suppose it is…"

At length, she muttered with a sigh.

Epilogue

Sakaguchi, Michiyo. Cra Cra Diary. Bungeishunjū

Perhaps having been blown from somewhere, dead leaves littered the front of the shop. I currently swept them out once a week, but maybe it would be better to start doing it every day for a while.

I moved the discount cart and the sign back inside and flipped the “open” plate over to the “closed for business” side. Cawing crows could be heard in the distance.

It was closing time at Biblia Books. I came back into the shop as Shioriko was finishing up putting the cash into a zippered bank bag.

“I’m going to put the money in the safe. Could you turn off the lights please?”

She briskly gave me instructions and left for the main house. When she opened the door, the faint smell of curry wafted out. That was probably Shioriko’s dinner.

The shop suddenly felt much bigger now that I was alone. It was strange to think that this had been normal when I was managing the shop on my own over the summer.

Two weeks had already passed since we went to Fujisawa to buy the old manga. It felt like Shioriko had finally regained her spirits.

Some of the books ended up being sold online, and the rest were put up for sale in the antiquarian book market where other book sellers could buy them. Quite a few used bookstores entered bids for them. A long standing shop in Kanda-Jinbōchō[1] had the highest bid and won the lot. Perhaps the books would find a home

on the bookshelf of some other Fujiko Fujio enthusiast.

I turned off all the lights above the counter. Shioriko returned just after I pulled the plug for the display window's fluorescent light. She was holding a large paper bag as well as a steaming mug in her cane-less hand. They must have been considerably heavy since her arms were trembling.

"Umm…Could you take these for me?"

"Ah, sure."

I took the paper bag and mug from her like she asked and placed them on the counter. There were hardcover books tightly packed into the paper bag.

"As for the books, please take them out to the discount cart tomorrow…the coffee is for you if you want it. Good work today."

"Thank you very much."

I took a sip of coffee from the mug. Shioriko looked me over with a smile on her face. Being the only one drinking somehow made me feel uneasy.

"I have milk and sugar in the back…but are you okay with having it black?"

"Yeah."

I nodded. Either way was fine with me.

"Um, what about you?"

"Oh"

She put her hand to her mouth. It wasn't that she didn't want any, she'd just forgotten to make some for herself, it seemed.

"I'm going to brew some more for myself, please wait a moment."

"No, wait"

I called out to her before she excitedly went back. Coming and

going would take too much time.

“If you’re okay with me having put my mouth on it, will you drink this together with me? I can’t finish it all myself.”

After thinking for a moment, she quickly nodded.

“Sorry…I’ll have some too.”

I put the mug on the corner of the counter, and we took turns drinking from it. She had recently started bringing drinks like this after work on occasion.

“Ah, that’s right. Would you like to have dinner with us this evening?”

She said as if suddenly remembering to ask.

“My sister is making curry today, but she always ends up making more than the two of us can eat.”

“Eh? Is it really okay?”

It had been about three months since I started working here, but this was the first time I had ever gotten a request like this.

“If you’re fine with chicken curry…”

“I’d love to…we always have chicken curry at my house.”

“Same here. But we buy other types of curry when we go out.”

I had the feeling that we had gotten closer lately, after our conversation at Shichirigahama Beach. Maybe it was because I listened to her talk about her mother for a long time—I also unfortunately ended up hearing her declaration that she never wanted to get married in the process.

I absentmindedly took the books out of the paper bag and stacked them on the counter as Shinokawa chit-chatted. It looked like she had gotten them from her room as usual.

“Hm…?”

There was a familiar title mixed in among them. Sakaguchi

Michiyo's *Cra Cra Diary*. Not only that, there were three copies. But we should have already sold 5 or 6 of them. I put them on the now-empty paper bag and looked at her.

"Why do you have more copies of *Cra Cra Diary*?"

"Because I bought them."

"You bought them?"

I replied with a question. She was the one who told me that this was the book her missing mother had left behind and that she couldn't bring herself to like it.

"Why did you buy them?"

"That's a secret."

A smile floated onto her full lips...no perhaps it was a bitter smile. I took another sip of the coffee. It seemed that asking any further would be prying.

However...

A thought occurred to me.

There was no way around asking prying questions if I really wanted to know someone deeply. If I watched over her without doing anything, even the relationship we had now would end up disappearing. I only needed to experience that once.

I quietly set down the mug.

"Can I guess at what that secret is?"

Shioriko, who was about to drink the coffee next, blinked behind her glasses. I was starting to think that I shouldn't have said that and got a little flustered, but there was no taking it back now.

"Just guessing?"

She tilted her head.

"Huh?"

“No…well, you said that and didn’t mention any conditions if you got it right or if you got it wrong…”

It seemed she wasn’t opposed to talking about it. I didn’t expect her to ask about a condition though.

“Ah—alright, I see….”

I was panicking. Thinking up a good condition on the spot wasn’t easy.

“…What about going somewhere with me this weekend? I can drive to wherever you like.”

It was a transparent ploy, even for me. Anyone who heard that would think it was an invitation to a date. How did this even turn into a bet in the first place?

“Alright. That works.”

It was now my turn to be surprised. She accepted my suggestion so easily.

“Is that really okay?

“I’ve been unable to go around bookshops since my injury, and it’s been bothering me quite a lot…will you be fine no matter what store we go to?”

In fact, she sounded cheerful. It seemed our destination was limited only to antiquarian bookshops. She didn’t think of this as a date even a little bit.

I guess that was alright. I cleared my throat.

“Can I ask a question?”

I asked her while putting my finger to my temple. The truth was that I already had a vague idea, but there were a few things I wanted to confirm.

“If it’s something I can answer.”

“What did you do with the book that your mother left you?”

“I disposed of it.”

“Did she end up leaving behind a message for you?”

“…I don’t know.”

“You don’t know?”

“Question time is now over.”

Shioriko had a mischievous smile. Although we were talking about her mother, a topic which she disliked, she seemed more lively than usual. Maybe she enjoyed mysteries involving books, even if she wasn’t the one solving them. Well, I was similar to her in that regard.

“Do you have an answer?”

I was organizing all of the information I had obtained until now in my head. It felt like I had pretty much zeroed in on the answer. Rather than deducing the solution, I merely used my knowledge of what kind of person Shinokawa Shioriko was.

“You said that you disposed of the book that your mother left behind for you, correct?”

“Yes.”

“But you never said you threw it away.”

I continued talking. It was the main point from here.

“It ended up in the used book market, didn’t it? The one who took it there was the person who was managing the shop at the time, your father. Because of that, you never found out which store it went to…”

Shioriko silently listened. It seemed none of what I said so far was wrong.

“You’ve been looking for the book ever since. Perhaps it’s being sold in an antiquarian bookshop somewhere…the ones you have here are ones you purchased online, right? You make an order

whenever find a similar copy, check the contents, and sell it on the discount cart once you find that it's wrong. That's the reason why you have so many copies of the same book."

The coffee was no longer steaming. Shioriko took a long sip before speaking.

"What makes you think I'm looking for a book I lost?"

"You said it yourself just now, that you didn't know whether or not there was a message. When you first saw the book your mother left behind, you thought you already understood the message she was trying to convey. Because of that, you disposed of it without even reading it. But you realized afterwards, didn't you? That there could have also been a letter for you inside. That's what you're trying to confirm."

Silence returned to the store. I quietly waited for Shioriko's reply.

Despite the fact that she resembled her mother, she couldn't understand all of what her mother was thinking. Because of that, she probably wanted to find the book her mother left behind and confirm the truth with her own eyes.

"There's an antiquarian bookshop in Yokohama that I've always wanted to go to…"

She muttered without looking at me.

"Please take me with you this weekend."

Afterwords

I touched on this in the previous volume's afterword, but I chose Kita-Kamakura as the setting because it fits the image I wanted and because it is a familiar place for me.

I attended a high school in Kita-Kamakura for three years. To get to my old school, you can either take the bus from Ofuna station, or go up the steep slope from Kita-Kamakura station. Continue past the houses on the mountain slope and a concrete school building will come into view—some of you might recognize it when I write it like that, but the model for the protagonist Daisuke's high school was my own alma mater.

The school had a splendid view due to its elevation; on clear days, you could even see out to the sea.

I was happy to receive so many responses to the story, although it was still incredibly shocking to see people precisely identify which high school the protagonist went to. It was almost like they had graduated from the same school. Maybe some were even my fellow classmates. They would know more than well enough just how painful it was running up that hill to avoid being late for school.

Some of the things that appear in this story are real while others are not. I also wrote this in the previous afterword, but all of the books that appear do in face exist. In the same vein, the locations mentioned in and around Kamakura are also real.

Some of the shops and establishments that the characters visited were modeled after real places, while others were not. Just like with the school Daisuke went to, people familiar with the area were surprisingly adept at figuring them out.

Although the characters themselves are completely fictional. That is to say, they aren't based people living out there

somewhere. There’s a clear distinction as far as that’s concerned.

There were many things that I had to research for this volume so first, I would like to thank the people of Kobundo Books in Kamakura for graciously helping me collect information.

I would like to extend my gratitude to the readers as well. We’ve finally reached the main story.

I would be delighted to meet you again in the next volume.

-Mikami En

Translator Notes

Prologue

[1] “Kura Kura” is an onomatopoeic for getting dizzy (or in this case, tipsy.)

Epilogue

[1] Kanda-Jinbōchō is Tokyo's center of used bookstores, apparently. Pretty cool. **https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jinb%C5%8Dch%C5%8D,_Tokyo**